WHERE THE SOULS OF MEN ARE CALLING

CREDO HARRIS

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WHERE THE SOULS OF MEN ARE CALLING

Where the Souls of Men Are Calling

A Love Story Out Of The War Zone

By CREDO HARRIS

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WHERE THE SOULS OF MEN ARE CALLING

CHAPTER I

HILLSDALE is "somewhere in the United States of America"—but there are hundreds of Hillsdales!

This particular Hillsdale is no less, no more, than the others. It contains the usual center of business activity clustering about a rather modern hotel. One of its livery stables has been remodelled into a moving-picture house, the other into a garage; one of its newspapers has become a daily, the other still holds to a Friday issue. In its outlying districts will be found hitching racks before the stores. Altogether, Hillsdale might be said to be "on the fence," with one leg toward progressiveness, the other still lingering in the past.

Its residences have not grown beyond the rambling, mellow kind, that drowse in poetic languor amidst flowering vines and trees. These trees, that also line the streets, meeting in cathedral arches overhead, might be stately elms of New England, poplars of the middle-west, or live-oaks of the south; for it must be strictly borne in mind that Hillsdale is "somewhere in the United States."

One mild day in early April, 1917, in the side yard of a corner house well away from traffic noises, two trim little women, Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie Tumpson, were delicately uncovering their tulip beds when Colonel Hampton, passing on his way down town, stopped and raised his hat. An imperceptible agitation rustled their conventional exteriors, since it was an occasion of pleasure when Colonel Hampton paused at anyone's fence. They noticed, however, that his usual geniality was lacking; that the kindly seams in his face were set into lines of sternness.

"Well, m'em," he thundered, "their damned outrages continue!"

Miss Sallie gasped and stared at him, while

her more timid sister was too much taken aback to move. In the forty-odd years of their acquaintance with this agreeable product of the mid-Victorian era, this was the first time they had heard an oath pass his lips—without an immediate apology; and the apology had not been forthcoming.

"Yes, m'em," he cried, striking the ferrule of his cane on the sidewalk, "their damned outrages continue!"

"Why, Colonel," Miss Veemie faltered, "whatever can have happened?" She was a trifle deaf, but she had no difficulty whatever in understanding the irate gentleman before her.

"Colonel Hampton," Miss Sallie, as was her habit, took the offensive, "what do you mean, sir!"

"Mean enough, and happened enough!" The cane again added emphasis. "Those German vipers have torpedoed another of our ships! The de-humanized outcasts, the blood-crazed toads, have wantonly destroyed more American lives! I tell you, m'em, our President is getting damned tired of it, and we'll have war

as certain as your tulips are sure to be the fairest in our proud city, m'em!"

The cheeks of the little ladies flushed at this dull prophecy, but for quite a minute the three remained silent.

"Mercy, I hope not," Miss Veemie sighed at last—meaning the war, of course. "It's terrible!"

"And peace can be terrible," the Colonel thundered. "A country that buys peace at the price of dishonor is no better than a frump who sells her soul for gewgaws and furbalows! When posterity shall read of how the diseased mind of a single lunatic has stabbed history's richest pages with a sword of murder, rapacity and lust, it will turn a lip of contempt toward every nation that stood upon a vacuous neutrality. To hell with neutrality, when a madman stalks abroad!"

Miss Veemie now felt that she had been silenced for the rest of time, and Miss Sallie's delicate hands, incongruously housed in heavy garden gloves, became expressive of horrified amazement.

"What?" he demanded, looking more than ever furious.

The little ladies jumped, and Miss Sallie made haste to say:

"Why—why nothing."

He eyed them for a moment; not suspiciously, but with anger at everything in the universe—themselves, perhaps, excepted.

"Where's Jeb?" he asked.

"He went into the country again with his rifle this morning," Miss Sallie answered. "He feels as you do, Colonel, that the time has come to strike and we must be preparing for it."

"But I wish you'd speak to him," Miss Veemie imploringly added. "He's bent on getting ready and being among the first, if the time comes, and—and——"

"And he'll do it in splendid style, rest assured of it, m'em! Jeb will make a fine soldier! —he comes from a line of soldiers!"

Tears filled Miss Veemie's eyes.

"We've never seriously thought that Jeb——" she began, but could get no farther and relapsed into a sorrowful contemplation of the tulip bed.

"There, there; I know, I know," the old gentleman interrupted gently. "I know how you feel about him; I know how you've both been more than mothers to him!"

"We've done our best," there was a tightness in Miss Sallie's voice. "He never remembered his own mother, and was so little when dear brother Jebediah died."

"I know, I know," he murmured. "How old is Jeb?"

"Twenty-six."

Another silence fell upon them. Then the Colonel sighed, turned and started on his way downtown, still muttering to himself as he went:

"I know, I know. All the same, that Kaiser's a damned murderer, and we've got to smash him if it takes the last drop of blood in Hillsdale; yes, sir, the last precious drop!" So by the time he reached the hotel his step was vigorous and the ferrule of his cane struck the sidewalk with military precision. Fifty-three years ago he had marched that way with Grant—or was it with Lee? Hillsdales do spread over such a lot of territory!

"Did you ever!" Miss Sallie gasped, breaking the silence.

"Sakes alive," Miss Veemie whispered, calling upon her nearest approach to profanity. But they continued to stare after him, by unspoken accord moving to the fence and leaning over it, farther and farther, to keep him in sight as long as possible.

It was while they were so occupied that a girl stepped out upon the side veranda. She hesitated an instant, poising lightly in surprise at their rather unusual attitudes, and biting her lips to keep from laughing outright. Then coming down into the garden, she asked:

"Is the parade in sight yet?"

Turning, they rushed at her.

"*Marian!* When did you get home? How did you get in without our seeing you?"

Her parasol fell to the ground before their onslaught of affectionate greetings, as they held her off, only to draw her close to them.

"Why," she laughed, somewhat out of breath, "the front door was open—as usual; so I came on through—as usual—looking for you!"

"*When* did you get home?" they insisted. "Is it really you?"

"You little dears," she cried. "Oh, but it's good to see you!"

"But *when* did you come?"

"Last night!"

"And you're going to stay?"

"Hm-hm," she laughed, kissing them upon the cheeks. "I suppose I'll have to, unless Daddy has a change of heart and lets me go to France."

"France, nonsense! Stand off, and let's see you," Miss Sallie commanded. "My! My! And you're really a trained nurse?"

"Really a trained nurse," she answered enthusiastically.

"I could never understand why you wanted to be," Miss Veemie faltered, looking at her as though she were convinced that contact with the big cities and hospitals and surgical cases must surely have left an unfavorable impress. "But you haven't changed—I do believe! Why, child, you're even prettier! Is that taffeta, my dear? How much did you pay for it?"

"Sister Veemie," Miss Sallie interrupted

with a shade of annoyance, "for pity sake don't begin to talk dresses—though it *is* becoming, my dear," she turned to Marian. "Have you seen Jeb?"

The girl hesitated, yet not exactly in embarrassment, and answered slowly:

"No. Is he well?"

"More than well—and simply daft with his preparations for the war!"

"Preparations for the war?" she asked, not understanding.

"Why, my child, he goes into the country every day to shoot his rifle, he's so in earnest! I do believe that if Congress could hear half he thinks about the insults we are forced to swallow, they'd declare war tomorrow!"

"Sister Sallie thinks he should have been named Patrick Henry," Miss Veemie sighed, "but I'm sure I can't imagine why! Jebediah is much prettier."

Miss Sallie ignored this, and in a more confidential tone continued:

"When he was a little boy, a fortune teller said——"

"Oh, I know," Marian laughed, "—said he might be President some day!"

"Well, my dear, I really shouldn't wonder! But, oh, why have you stayed away from us so long! Did nursing take so much time to learn? Now that you're back," her voice grew tender, "I do hope you and Jeb—well, you know that it was your dear mother's wish, and his dear mother's wish, Marian."

"Please don't," the girl interrupted hastily. "I've heard that a thousand times. Besides, Jeb and I were only four months old when our mothers died; and besides that," she smiled prettily, "Jeb has surely recovered from his silly notions by now."

"Jeb will entertain whatever notions I tell him to," Miss Sallie declared with vigor.

"Then I don't want to see him," Marian laughed, though with not enough conviction, perhaps, to keep Miss Sallie from darting a look of encouragement at her sister, who, failing to understand it, observed:

"Colonel Hampton just passed before you came; did you see him?"

"No!—bless his old heart! How is he?—

quite as foolishly angry with my father as ever, I suppose?''

''He's not all to blame for that.'' Miss Sallie compressed her lips. ''Your father, my dear, is as good a hater as he is an editor.''

''Which is going some,'' Marian laughed.

''Going how?'' Miss Veemie asked, protestingly.

''I must say,'' Miss Sallie interposed, ''that the Colonel has been a devoted friend to Jeb!''

''And I'm devoted to the Colonel,'' Marian quickly replied, as though her loyalty had been challenged. ''You both know how I've deplored that quarrel—why, it started long, long before I was born, and I'm sure they've forgotten its origin!''

''Politics! Wretched politics,'' Miss Sallie sighed. ''I've often thought, my child, how easily you might re-cement their friendship.'' She looked wistfully at the girl, who asked in all sincerity:

''How?''

''The Colonel is so fond of Jeb, and you are your father's only child! Can't you just fancy

them clasping hands beneath a wedding bell of beautiful lilies?"

"It's easier to fancy them quarreling again the next day! No," she began to laugh delightedly, "if you're so set on having a wedding, marry them to each other; then they can fuss to their heart's content and nobody will mind. There, forgive me!" she cried, putting her arms about Miss Veemie, who was taking this seriously, and almost gasping for breath, "I was horrid to joke about it! But you mustn't let Miss Sallie put those silly thoughts on Jeb and me, really! Remember, I've been away two years—two years this very sixth of April—and see how we've both improved!"

There might have been a slight suspicion of yearning that somehow got into her voice as she said this; at any rate, Miss Sallie thought so, and wisely decided to let the subject rest awhile.

Marian walked to the fallen parasol, picked it up and opened it.

"I suppose I ought to be going," she said. "Father expects me about twelve. Your tulips

are looking well, for this early," she continued evenly. "Do you still have the scarlet ones in this bed? And, oh, I wonder if I can see the courthouse clock from your fence, as I used to!"

She leaned over the pickets, looking; then glanced up the street in the other direction. Miss Sallie did not miss the significance of this, and smiled.

"What time is it?" she asked, as Marian turned around.

"I—I really; isn't that funny? I've forgotten!" And to hide a very genuine embarrassment she leaned again over the pickets; glancing, as before, up and down the street where the courthouse was, and was not, but now giving a little exclamation of pleasure.

"He's coming! Your spoiled nephew is at the corner."

She glanced at Miss Sallie, and found that little lady beaming pleasantly with a "bless you, my children," countenance that sent the blood flying to her cheeks. She felt suddenly afraid to stay and face the man from whom, at the last moment and as a last resort, she had fled to keep from giving a certain answer to his

insistent pleadings. She knew that he would plead again, even after two years of waiting; and, in a sense, she wanted him to plead, though not just at this spot, nor until she had gathered up her forces with which she might artfully resist him awhile longer.

"Well, goodbye, everybody," she said quickly. "I must hurry downtown."

"Without seeing Jeb?" Miss Sallie exclaimed.

"Oh, I'll see him soon. We can't escape each other very long in Hillsdale," she laughed.

"But, my child, it will only be a minute! You surely——"

Jeb, having entered by the front way, was now heard whistling as he came through the house, and the next moment he stepped out on the side veranda; then stopped, crying joyously:

"Marian!"

"Hello, Jeb," she said, advancing with a candor that belied the look Miss Sallie had surprised half a minute before.

"Oh, Jeb," Miss Veemie glided toward him, "I've been so worried for fear your gun had

exploded and done something! Are you tired, dear?"

This adulation had been a daily occurrence in Jeb's life since he was four years old, when these adoring aunts had taken him beneath their roof. Usually he met it half way, but now, with an indifference that in a moment of less excitement would have been pronounced, he passed her and caught Marian's hand, crying:

"This *is* a surprise! Did you drop out of the trees?"

"That savors horribly of monkeys, Jeb," she laughed, quietly withdrawing her hand. "You used to do better!"

"I meant to ask how long since you dropped down from heaven, angel," he smiled. "My word, but you're looking fit! For a three times winner, you just about take the cake!"

"Cake, dear?" Miss Veemie sweetly inquired. "Certainly you shall!" And, turning, she hurried busily into the house, Miss Sallie following with an expression about her mouth which said as plainly as words that her well-meaning sister would not emerge with cake, or anything else, to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* so promising.

Jeb waited until they had quite disappeared, then he crossed to Marian, asking soberly:

"Why did you run away, just when you promised to tell me what I wanted to hear?—and why didn't you answer my letters?"

"I wonder," she said, turning toward the flower beds, "if the tulips will be in bloom soon! I'd so love to see them again!"

He laughed tenderly, but persisted:

"Why did you run away?—why didn't you answer my letters?"

"Oh, those things happened two years ago, Jeb. Haven't you advanced at all?—do you always live in the past like a silly old man? You didn't write but three times, anyway!"

"Good Lord, how many times did you expect me to write without getting an answer?" he cried.

"Oh," she answered indifferently, "as many times as you thought it was worth doing. I might have answered the fourth; one can never tell about those things. Miss Sallie says you're getting ready to fight, Jeb. Are you thinking of going over to join the British or French?"

"Not for me," he laughed, disregarding,

somewhat to her surprise, the subject of letters and answers. "They can peg along with their own scrap; I'm getting in shape for this country, if it becomes involved! You ought to see the hikes I take, Marian! Twelve miles in a forenoon—easy! And my shooting is really—look here!" He began fumbling in his pocket and brought out several paper targets which he unfolded and held before her. "What d'you think of that for three hundred yards!—five centers! Here's the four hundred!—look, Marian! Isn't it a peach? By Jove, if ever I get a crack at those Huns, there'll be a few less!"

From the targets, over which he was now bending in feverish interest, she glanced up at him without being observed, her face somewhat puzzled. She felt extremely gratified that Jeb had made these perfect scores, and her spirit thrilled with his martial fervor; but, on the other hand, he had just been talking about a certain question which she had evaded two years ago by running away to take a hospital course in nursing, and it seemed to her that he was dismissing it rather abruptly. Yet she

knew Jeb's temperament, as any girl will know a man with whom she has been a play-fellow since childhood; and, although hardly prepared for it just at this moment, she read aright that his love of self, his thirst for praise, had in no wise diminished. Had she been asked for a direct answer she could have told that his enthusiasm for target practice in the woods, where for hours he pretended to be shooting Germans, was vital to his abnormally active imagination; for Jeb, although a giant in strength and a god in grace, possessed the brow and eyes of an inveterate dreamer.

Formerly his dreams had run to adventure of a milder form, sometimes to verse, once or twice or thrice or more to love. He had, as a matter of fact, for short periods loved nearly all the girls in Hillsdale who were pretty enough, and clever enough; never becoming really serious—unless it was with her! But she had laughed at him then, sympathetically and sweetly, reminding him that they had grown up together, besides being each of them twenty-four.

Not that she believed these were serious ob-

stacles, but at the time they served; for, if the strict truth be told, Marian understood Jeb too well to confess how much she cared. His exceptional charm, fascinating her beyond anything she had experienced, was, on the other hand, marred by his inordinate vanity. His extreme courtesy, urban manner and quick instinct for thoughtful attentions to old and young alike, she read truly as superficial, rather than sincere, kindnesses. The casual acquaintance would not have discovered this—but Marian had grown up with him! She *could* love him, she had more than a hundred times told herself—God, yes! Alone in the nights when his warm bronze coloring of perfect health seemed near to her, she had admitted this. Yet by day she laughed at it; and laughed at Jeb. Thereupon Jeb had settled down in earnest to win her.

Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie had watched through a prayer-glass the beginning of that ardent affair. From their lofty place of vantage twenty-four and twenty-four might not have been quite suitable, but years could stand for naught against the tower of mental strength and character with which they knew Marian to

be possessed. They would gladly have greeted her as one of themselves, one to mother Jeb, to see that he was warmly clothed and did not eat imprudently. He had always been a child to them! Many times, in the bygone days, Miss Sallie would hint at this ideal mating, till at last the daughter of Amos Strong had wrapped the little woman in her arms, saying sweetly that she preferred something in life besides "mothering an overgrown, selfish boy."

It had cost her something to say this, for in her heart she was just beginning to know how adoringly she could be these things and more to him. As a child she mothered him; at ten he bullied her; in their 'teens she had bossed and mothered him again! Love him? She admitted it through tears to her mirror—and yet, withal, she had understood him just a shade too well!

Then came the day—as such days will—when she was cornered, pinioned, made captive!—when she could no longer fight, and knew that surrender was but a matter of hours. Much of that night (she remembered every minute of it now!) she had lain awake watching her heart and her level judgment wage their last battle;

and the next afternoon, an hour before he was to come, she quietly left for Baltimore, or New York—or it may have been Chicago—to take the course in nursing.

Her eyes now swept him with tenderness as the memory of that day came rushing back, but a shadow of disappointment crossed them as she saw that he was still looking, fascinated, at the proof of his skill. Was her return, after an absence of two years, so meaningless that he could be engrossed by a few sheets of inert paper while she stood within touch of him?

"You shoot very well, Jeb," she said, casually.

"Don't I though!" he cried. "See, Marian —here's the five hundred!"

"I should think," she said, glancing at it indifferently, "that you'd join the regular army."

"You bet I will, if the time ever comes when we've got to fight! I wouldn't ask for anything better! Gee, I wish we'd declare war tomorrow!"

"I rather think," she slowly replied, "that your wish is very near fulfillment, Jeb."

He turned quickly and stared at her.

"What makes you say that?" he asked, tensely.

Had her eyes been looking at him then she might have seen something in his drawn face and blanched cheeks that would have struck dismay into her very soul; but, as it was, she attributed the question purely and simply to his eagerness for service, and answered with a suggestion of sharpness that was not lost on him:

"Because there's a limit, Jeb, to the patience of a country, just as there is to the patience of men and women. Even the mildest of us reach the end of our endurance, sooner or later," she added, not knowing whether she wanted to laugh or be furious.

"Oh, come," he cried, squaring his shoulders. "I thought maybe you had some inside news from your father! Don't be a gloom, Marian! The war's three thousand miles away from us, and that's where it's going to stay—take my word for it!"

"But I thought you were crazy for it," she turned on him in surprise.

He shifted uneasily, but his voice rang strong and true as he answered:

"I am crazy for it! What d'you suppose I've been getting ready for all these months? But you leave wars and that sort of thing to us men! You haven't anything to do with 'em!"

"We have to nurse you in wars, Jeb, just as we do in times of peace," she laughed. "Really, I don't see how such big babies as some men I know can conduct a first class war, anyhow!"

This was the old Marian again; lightly bantering, deliciously good to look upon. He moved close to her, and asked earnestly:

"Why did you run away from me?"

"I wanted to be a nurse," she answered.

"But why did you decide so quickly to be a nurse?"

She hesitated, then smiled:

"It was better than the other alternative."

"Now that you are a nurse, can't you accept the other alternative, too? You know I want you just as much."

His voice, deep and resonant with a timbre that went to women's hearts, thrilled her delightfully. But she had not forgiven him for the paper target episode, wherein she had been pushed aside to make way for his skill. There

were, moreover, plans that had been fermenting in her mind for many months—plans of which marriage should not be a part—and she answered him frankly:

"I really don't know at all, Jeb—I haven't had time to think. Of course, should our country get into this war, daddy has promised to let me go across at once; otherwise he insists that I can't. Still, if I go to France, you will, too, for that matter," she added brightly. Then the color flew to her cheeks. "Maybe when I saw you in uniform, Jeb, and realized that you —that we might neither of us get back, then I might—we might——"

She was looking down, unable to go farther without assistance; but he offered none, and they stood for several moments in absolute silence—for a quick spasm of fright had shot across his soul! The sublimity of her partial surrender, contingent only upon his transportation to a foreign battlefield, suddenly brought the war from three thousand miles away to his very door. But his next feeling was one of self-contempt, and squaring his shoulders with a jerk he said:

"I love your pluck! Then it's all settled."

"Oh, it isn't all settled by a great deal," she laughed; but, seeing his face, gasped in mock astonishment. "Heavens! Which is making you look so like a ghost—marriage or war?"

"They're quite synonymous," he replied, trying to match her banter. "May I speak to your illustrious father?"

"That reminds me that I've an engagement with him right now," she exclaimed. "For the present, you may say good-bye to Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie for me."

With a pretty smile and toss of her head she swept him a little courtesy, then turned to the gate, but he called after her:

"Wait! I'll go with you—and show him my targets!"

She stopped, looking back as though she had not heard aright.

"Targets?" she asked, slightly arching her brows.

"Why, these, of course," he cried, drawing them again from his breast pocket. "I always hunt him up, or the Colonel, when I've made a cracker-jack score! It tickles 'em to death!"

He sprang to the gate and held it open for her to pass, apparently having forgotten everything but a desire to reap praise from one or the other of these old gentlemen; who in their turns, although separately, had never failed to be genially appreciative. The flavor of war, which filled the air as a restless spirit since diplomatic relations with Germany had come to an end—the numb fear with which he had been obsessed but a moment ago—were completely relegated to the limbo of forgetfulness as he now issued forth in search of praise wherewith to feed his vanity.

Whenever it so happened that he failed to get a sufficient amount of this from one or the other of these men, or from his adoring aunts, he drew it from himself. He could not have named a night for months that he had fallen asleep without first thinking of the splendid soldier he would make. He would let his imagination run riot and live through battle after battle, leading his men intrepidly—men who loved the very ground on which he trod. Into the thickest places where old veterans could not have stood the gaff, he went with calm indifference. Vic-

tory followed victory—complete, hilarious victories! Dead Germans, prisoners, and cannon which Jeb flung into the game bag of his waking dreams, if put side by side, would have reached around the world.

'Tis true, that this top-lofty state of mind suffered a complete relapse when Bernstorff got his papers, and for the first time Jeb seriously felt the cold fingers of fear reach out and touch him. It had been a peculiar change, that for awhile startled him more than the imminence of war. He might have been thrilled over the wild race, the reckless dash, as of unbridled horses, with which a nation long in suspense hurtled toward a finality; but it was an elation thoroughly dampened by dread. As the days had passed, however, and nothing more terrible happened, his courage came creeping back, even growing into modest bravado. Excursions to the country with his rifle became frequent again. He began to feel himself stiffen-up when Miss Sallie would tell a neighbor how he was getting ready for the possible war; this neighbor told other neighbors, and he was soon basking in admiring looks which were as meat and drink

to him. It was on this crest of popularity that Marian found him when she returned to Hillsdale.

With a face utterly devoid of expression she watched him now while he held back the gate with one hand while trying to stuff the bulkily folded targets into his pocket.

"Maybe you'd rather carry them, Marian," he said, "and we can look at them again on the way downtown!"

She did not answer.

"I always take them down to your father, you know," he said again.

"I should think daddy would be immensely flattered," she observed, passing out to the street.

Scarcely had the gate closed after them when Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie, guilt written in every line of their radiant faces, tiptoed from the house, stepped into the garden and ran to the fence. As they had formerly done while watching Colonel Hampton stalk angrily townward, they now, also, leaned farther and farther over the pickets, keeping the young people who comprised their hope in view to the very last.

CHAPTER II

Colonel Hampton, after leaving the Tumpson sisters in a fog of astonishment, did not pause at the hotel and sink into the porch chair that had become his by right of daily occupation. This morning his mind was set upon greater things. Affectionate greetings from passing friends hardly checked him, and he strode deliberately onward to the office of the Hills County *Eagle,* the daily, owned and edited by Amos Strong—a long ago friend, although for twice a score of years his most unrelenting political foe. There had been a time when the town prophesied a "meeting" between these two, but their enmity had finally congealed into nothing more deadly than complete estrangement.

Now, indifferent to a look of consternation on a reporter's face, the Colonel stamped across

the "city room," glared around until he saw a glass door marked "editor," pushed it violently open without knocking and closed it after him. This had not happened in the reporter's memory; it had, on the other hand, been just the thing everybody feared might come to pass.

The grizzled editor did not immediately look up; yet, when he did, his astonishment was complete, and his ever alert mind reviewed the *Eagle's* recent utterances to discover if therein lay a reason for this visit. Recalling nothing of particular belligerency—at any rate, nothing against the Colonel—he said crisply:

"Take a seat, Colonel Hampton."

"Colonel Hampton will never take a seat in your office, sir," his caller thundered, greatly emphasizing "Colonel Hampton." And, answering a further look of perplexity in the editor's face that now betrayed a growing anger, he continued jerkily: "We're coming very near to war, sir; this country, our country, against those sickening anti-Christs who bayonet children, rape women, and wantonly torture unto death defenseless men—and boast of it, sir; gloat over it! It'll be our country against that

polluted swamp of slimy creatures, sir; and in our country there shall be neither Democrats nor Republicans! Politics be damned, sir! Until those breeders of paresis—those Hohenzollern upstarts who, as God is my witness, are the vomit of hell—shall be stripped of their freedom, you and I cast our vote for Humanity! Amos, I want to take your hand, and I want you to take mine!"

Mr. Strong sprang to his feet and his chair fell heavily to the floor. It was this alarming noise that reached the listening reporter's ear and brought him in haste to his chief's aid; yet when he had pushed open the door, unnoticed by those within, he drew quickly back and tiptoed to his desk. There are some things at which even a reporter may not gaze.

"Do you agree with me that there should and will be war, Roger?" Mr. Strong was saying half an hour later. They were comfortably settled now, with cigars alight, and except for slight traces where tears had marked their cheeks no one would have suspected aught but a lifetime of congeniality.

"Both should and will, Amos! It is one of

the few expressions in your columns with which I have thoroughly concurred."

Mr. Strong burst into a merry laugh and waved the handkerchief that was still in his hand, crying:

"Truce, truce! You forget, Roger!"

"So I do, so I do, Amos! We sha'n't open the old wounds again—at least, not so long as our country is in need of cohesion. My anger, I assure you, was never as great as my amazement that one of your talents could—but there, there! I may have been somewhat wrong, also—as a matter of fact, Amos, I shouldn't be surprised if that were so! Tell me of Marian! When is she coming back to us again?"

A look of new pleasure crossed the editor's grizzled face as he answered:

"She got home last night, Roger—and the first thing she did was to ask about you, whom she believed I hated!" Again he laughed, with a buoyancy that had not been in his voice for many years.

"She did that?" the Colonel cried, his eyes filling with tears. "God bless her! She's a noble girl, worthy of her noble father! Do you

know, Amos, I'm beginning to believe that she showed extraordinary foresight in taking that training! Why, even I considered it a romantic waste of time,—and so did you, Roger," he turned accusingly. "Admit it!"

"I did, but I wanted to humor her; for the purpose was noble, and it does a girl no harm. But I hope she won't hold me to a foolish promise I made, to let her go across should we become involved in this titanic struggle."

"God guide her aright," the Colonel whispered; to which his old friend murmured:

"Amen."

"I stopped by the Tumpson's," the Colonel resumed, after they had been for a moment silent. "Miss Sallie tells me that Jeb is out again with his rifle, as usual, and is showing more eagerness to be ready. I believe all our young men will respond nobly if the President calls for volunteers."

"Without a doubt of it, Roger; and Jeb ought to make a fine soldier—although he's had no military training."

"Well, no; but he's a handsome fellow, and a gentleman, and his father was our friend,

Amos. I can coach him, and give him a pretty fair idea of what war is like."

"There's some talk of schools being inaugurated for teaching such chaps as he, should the struggle really come; schools where the most approved methods of modern warfare will be demonstrated by our regularly qualified officers."

"Schools be damned, sir," the Colonel thundered. "What school, what infant West Pointer, is qualified better than I, who fought my weight in wildcats four successive years!—or you, sir, who I've no doubt fought well, too, although under the banner of a——"

"Truce, truce!" Mr. Strong cried, this time laughing till tears of pleasure ran down his cheeks. "At Shiloh, Roger, you knew how to honor a truce, for I carried the flag to you myself—and you weren't old enough to raise a mustache, either!"

"So you did, Amos; so you did—and, by gad, your cheeks were as smooth as a girl's, too!" the Colonel's voice dropped to the softness of reminiscence, growing harsh again as he added: "If I temporarily forget the rules of honorable

warfare, it's because my memory has been corrupted by the vileness of those Outcasts who, in their ego-mania, blaspheme the Almighty God by claiming kinship with Him. I wish you and I could go over there and clean up that pestilential Prussian herd! By gad, sir, they've the hoof and mouth disease, each confounded one of them! Whenever I think of them I get rush of blood to the head!"

"And rush of words to the tongue, Roger," the editor added, good naturedly. "But, my friend, such blasts of hatred are too German to be acceptable. We're not a nation of small venom!"

"I don't give a cracky whether we are or not! Those rag-tag and bobtail vermin are calling us names!—and, if I can't fight, by gad, I'll cuss back!"

"No, you won't, and be part of the big, conquering nation that you are. Those 'hymns of hate' don't affect England!—neither do the scores of lewd verses that flow like filth all over Germany! They are merely the wails of disappointed people, Roger,—the shrieks of a cruelly tricked national soul! Let them pass!"

"Disappointed people fiddle-sticks!—and I say that it's a tragic mistake to let anything pass! The most dangerous propaganda waged by German spies in this country—more alarming in its results thus far than the blowing up of munition factories, the setting afire of grain elevators, the enciting of Mexico—has been the honorless skill with which they have fed the American mind upon the idea of a disgruntled Germany, a starving Germany, and all such twaddle! Can't you see why such tales are being circulated? Simply to inject into our minds the poison of national inertia, so that when war comes—as it some day shall—every fellow will be likely to think: 'Oh, it can't last long now!—let the other boys get ready; I haven't time!' "

"I hadn't thought of that, Roger."

"Then think of it now; and, furthermore, remember this, Amos: that no sooner will war be declared before their propaganda will go one step farther. Do you know what it will be? Peace talk! Crumbling Germany ready to make terms! Why? Simply to keep filling our systems with more of the national inertia poison —to keep us retarded—to keep us from dash-

ing into the big game with every fibre quivering, and our souls afire to finish it up! Berlin's hope is that while America grows sleek with too much optimism, Germany will grow stronger to prolong her insolent and murderous campaign. Open your columns, Amos, and shout these truths broadcast—for therein will rest the salvation of our country! Germany poor in food or munitions?—fiddle-sticks! The German people disgruntled?—twaddle!"

"Where do you get this idea?" Mr. Strong looked at him in amazement.

"Out of my good, common horse-sense brain! You recall that story of the German Government confiscating the people's copper utensils and taking copper from the roofs of buildings, to keep up the manufacture of ammunition? Any school boy should have known that they didn't appropriate one copper pot, nor lift an inch of copper roofing, when the vast mines of Sweden pour their enormous output—not only of copper, but of unrivaled iron ore—in almost a continuous stream from Stockholm to Lübeck Bay; and von Capelle's fleet is there to see it safely across, too! The cry came forth that

they were short of cotton for explosives—and that cry was sent out on the very day a national holiday had been proclaimed to celebrate their discovery of a method by which all types of high explosives can be made without cotton! Why, Amos, lying is a fine art with that government! I read in your own paper a long and pathetic ditty, cabled from Amsterdam, about 'starving Germany!' Don't you know that, with the millions of deported Belgians, Serbians, and Poles—to say nothing of the war prisoners—Germany should have this year a larger acreage under cultivation than at any time since the Confederation? They know how to farm intensively over there, and get their fertilizer, as they have already been getting their fats—from their own dead. These are but the beginnings of other things our common sense would teach us, were we not hypnotized with a morbid craving to swallow their neatly prepared fairy-tales!"

"Roger," Mr. Strong sprang to his feet, "by the eternal, you speak inspired words! They *have* poisoned us with lies of a starving Imperial Government; they'll continue to poison us

with lies of an early peace—and then prepare fresh blows while we wallow in our self-complaisance! Open my columns? They'll blaze as columns of righteous fire!" Leaning forward, he added: "Why shouldn't we be getting ready here in Hillsdale? There's fine material for a company of militia! Will you join with me in equipping one?"

The Colonel banged his hand down on the table.

"Done!" he cried.

"And there," the editor continued, pointing out of the window, "is the captain for it!"

In an instant the Colonel was upon his feet, looking across the street to where his old friend pointed.

"Jeb!—and Marian!" he added, his voice ringing with delight. "Which is going to be the captain, Amos?" he chuckled. "By Gad, they're coming up! He'll make a fine officer!"

But Amos Strong was looking tenderly at the girl; then he turned and caught the Colonel's hand, crying:

"Roger, we'll set the pace for every city and town throughout our country. We'll equip the

company, so it'll be ready to go at the first crack—and Jeb will be a credit!"

"One who'll capture hearts as well as Huns, I'll warrant—if he's not already a helpless prisoner!"

The two old men looked at each other and smiled, and it was while they were in this attitude that Marian and Jeb entered.

She stopped on the threshold, scarcely believing her eyes; and Jeb, looking over her head, was no less mystified. That these two sworn enemies should be standing there, holding hands in all friendliness, surpassed the miraculous.

The men had turned cordially to welcome her, but hesitated at the amazement that was pictured in her face. Their reconciliation had been so spontaneously genuine that it seemed already to be a thing of long standing, and they did not penetrate Marian's embarrassment until she timidly advanced, asking:

"Is it all right for us to come in, Daddy? Were you and Colonel Hampton really shaking hands?"

He approached swiftly and took her in his

arms, turning to the Colonel and repeating the girl's question:

"Were we really shaking hands, Roger?"

"By gad, Amos, we've been shaking hands every day for forty years, only we didn't know it!"

"You should have come in before, Roger."

"How, in thunder, could I come in, when your perverted editorial columns were——"

"Stop!" Marian cried, running to him and throwing her arms about his neck. "Do you want it to begin all over again, just when I have you both together for the first time in my life?"

But her father laughed good-naturedly, knowing that as soon as he called "Truce!" the irate Colonel would subside.

"How in the world did it happen?" she asked, still clinging to the Colonel's neck and looking up into his eyes which were fast growing moist with tears of happiness. "Tell me at once, which of you was generous enough to make the first move?"

"Poof and nonsense!" he exclaimed, trying to frown upon her severely. "There was no

generosity about it! I reckon Amos and I know where each other lives!"

"You'll tell me, Daddy," she turned to him. "Which of you big babies was big enough——"

"Don't tell her a thing, Amos," the Colonel thundered, getting red.

"So you're the one, then," she smiled up at him. "I'm going to call you Uncle Roger!"—and she kissed him.

"I wish she'd call me Uncle Jeb," came a half sigh from across the table.

"She'll be calling you *Captain* Jeb,—eh, Roger?" Mr. Strong laughed. "Tell them about it!"

"Oh," the Colonel said, wiping his glasses, "my best friend, here, has proposed that he and I recruit a company of soldiers, equip it, and have it ready for business. Jeb is to be its captain."

"You mean uniforms, and everything?" Jeb cried.

"Uniforms and everything," Mr. Strong emphatically answered. "The story will run in to-morrow's *Eagle,* and we'll take recruits right here in this office, where Colonel Hampton—

your Uncle Roger," he pinched Marian's cheek, "will have charge. We'll wire Washington for a hundred and fifty equipments, and be drilling by this time next week. Now, what do you think about it?"

"I'm crazy about it," Jeb shouted; and Marian, catching his hands, cried:

"*Captain* Jeb! I'm as proud of you as I can be!"

His eyes were sparkling as he gazed down at her; his vivid imagination had lost no time picturing the khaki-clad lads, with him at their head, marching, drilling, and doing all manner of things of which he could not have told the names but had seen in the movies. She gloried in his enthusiasm, and squeezed his hands again, whispering:

"I'm proud of you!"

"There must be books and manuals and the like in Washington," the Colonel was saying, "which teach the duties of a captain; so we'll wire for them, also. Then I'll coach you, Jeb; I'll make an officer out of you, you young cub!"

More and more each of them had caught the spirit. Jeb's eyes danced; his pulse was bound-

ing; his dreams of military splendor were coming true. Marian had clasped her hands and rather worshipfully stared at him. Mr. Strong stood with legs apart, looking him over with unfeigned admiration; while the Colonel, also gazing, unconsciously drummed a marching tattoo with his fingers on the table.

It all seemed so easy! With the simple faith of men who implicitly believed the War Department would suspend business to fulfil their wishes, they decided to order uniforms and wire the Hillsdale representative to dash out in search of books. Jeb would absorb the books and become a captain; the Colonel, ensconced in Mr. Strong's room, would recruit the company, which, in turn, would don the uniforms and make Hillsdale gasp at its brilliant efficiency. Flags would wave, citizens would applaud, and the President would send a message of fervent congratulations. That was the way it seemed to Jeb. He did not dream of the nearness of the war, which had been viewed by him, as by millions of others, as a mirage far off beyond the seas. Now he spoke in a voice that trembled with pride:

"I'll make it a company of sharpshooters in no time; for, if there's one thing I can do, it's shoot! Look at my last targets!" he cried, drawing them from his pocket.

Meanwhile, the key out in the telegraph room began an agitated ticking. It was too early for "A.P. stuff," but the reporter recognized, by long association, sounds resembling the *Eagle's* call. Now he heard the operator give a low whistle, and that, also, from long association, he knew meant "flash!" so he sauntered back and sat on the table, waiting. In another moment he burst into Mr. Strong's room, thrusting a message across the targets which Jeb had just unfolded.

The editor read it and caught his breath, then passed it over to his friend, with the brief remark to all:

"War's declared!"

The Colonel sprang up as if electrified. Standing at full height he clasped both hands above his face and fervently cried:

"Thank God! The honor of our country is vindicated!"

War! Jeb felt suddenly sick and dizzy. The

targets which had meant so much to him, taking on a lustre as if they were jewels in his crown of pride, and passports to a military future, became gray and sordid. He hated them, he hated everything they stood for, and, seeing the eyes of Marian and her father fixed upon the Colonel, he surreptitiously dropped them to the floor, pushing them farther out of sight beneath the table with his foot.

"War!" Marian gasped, as though she were struggling to take in the full significance of this startling news. Then she flew to the editor and wrapped him in her arms, saying excitedly: "Oh, Daddy, remember your promise! I'm going!—I'm going! You *said* I could if it ever came!—and I'm all ready, Daddy dear, for the very first boat that leaves!"

The Colonel could not have told why, but suddenly he burst into tears, coughed, made a great fuss pulling himself together, and thundered:

"War! War on the damnedest hierachy of fiends—if I may use the term—the world has ever known! And we're going to thrash 'em if it takes the last drop of blood in Hillsdale; yes, sir, the very last drop! You, Jeb, will now lead

your company into the thick of it! Lord, boy, but I envy you!"

Marian left her father and ran to Jeb.

"Oh, just think!—maybe we can go on the same——" She stopped short, frightened at the appearance of his face. She tried to finish the sentence, but stammered over it as though her eyes, dilated with horror, were holding her tongue captive by what she saw.

Amos Strong had turned and was looking out of the window, overcome by the far-reaching consequences of his promise made half thoughtlessly two years before, and he therefore did not see the mute tragedy being played behind him; but the Colonel missed none of it, although his faith in Jeb was too deeply rooted to be shaken. He merely believed that his young friend had been shocked—for the moment shocked—and nothing more; a belief which he considered justified when Jeb, calling upon every ounce of the Tumpson pride, forced his knees to stiffen and his lips to smile.

Marian approached him.

"Jeb," she said, laughing a little hysterically, "you frightened me."

"How?" he turned to her slowly, still hammering himself into better control.

"Never mind now! Some day I'll offer you an apology."

Although she was still laughing, the Colonel saw at once what had been passing in her mind. It was an unfair suspicion, he thought, one unworthy of her, and for an instant his anger flamed. *He'd* show her what kind of stuff the son of his old friend was made of! He'd make her repent bitterly, by letting her realize that, once in France, Jeb might be lost to her forever! It was a cruelty unlike the Colonel, but he was mad through and through. To touch Jeb's honor was akin to touching his own. So he joined in laughing with her, and exclaimed:

"Jeb, your company will get the pick of it, for it's always the first boys over who draw the primest fighting—and you ought to be on the firing line by June! Think of that, sir! Why, it'll be another case of Kitchener's first hundred thousand—you'll get chewed up into little bits! Gad, but I envy you! Why, I'll bet a cooky there isn't a fellow in your company

who comes out with both legs! It's an opportunity of a life time, sir!"

Had Jeb not been quick enough to know that Marian was closely watching him, he might have cried aloud for the Colonel to be quiet. The old gentleman's enthusiastic words, in contrast to Jeb's earlier vision of gay uniforms, flashing bayonets, flags, soft smiles and dewy eyes, made the picture of actual war take on a thousand new horrors. He felt sick; the next instant he hated himself—but, above all other things, these people must never suspect him!

In the midst of this depression, while he seemed to be standing on a slave-block, while critical eyes bored him for defects, he thought of somebody's prophecy that the war would be over by July. This was a very large straw for Jeb just then, so he grasped it eagerly, summoning another grin and saying with a tremendous effort to keep his voice steady:

"I wouldn't ask for a greater picnic—if we get there in time! But some people think Germany's about done for!"

"That's because Germany *wants* us to think so." Mr. Strong, still looking out of the win-

dow, flung the words over his shoulder. "It's a crafty part of their scheme to bait us—Roger has opened my eyes to that!"

"By gad," the Colonel exclaimed, immensely pleased by the editor's acknowledgment, "the war won't be over until the armies of William the Vile, the Prussian Outcast Emperor, are licked to a frazzle—and that's going to take five million of our men, a hundred billion of our dollars, and a damned sight longer than any year, or two years, or three years; you can bet your last nickel on it!"

Marian gasped, and turned quickly away in order that he might not see her. She had not been as much affected by his words as by another look in Jeb's grinning, sickly face which made her want to run and hide—and cry. She, more than any of those present, could read his expressions like type in a book; yet in all justice to him she had never before seen an indication of cowardice and, impulsively loyal, desiring only to rescue him in time so that the Colonel might not find him out, she swung upon the old fellow's arm, saying gaily:

"He's unhappy thinking he won't get a

chance!—that's what's the matter, Uncle Roger!"

But even this new and affectionate title of "Uncle Roger" did not at once penetrate the old gentleman's mind. His eyes, which had been fixed on Jeb with an expression of hopefulness, were now studiously looking at the floor. Rather hysterically, Marian caught the lapels of his coat and put her face directly in his range of vision, crying:

"That's what it is!—I know it, Uncle Roger! Please understand me!"

"Sure, that's what it is," Jeb shouted forcefully, seeing the brink upon which he had been standing, and making an heroic effort to act the part of a man. "Sure it is," he repeated, with even more emphasis. "I don't care how long the darned old war lasts!—it's only how short it might last, that gets my goat!"

Marian was not deceived, but the Colonel, looking as though twenty years had been taken from his shoulders, swallowed it whole and struck the table sharply with his hand.

"By gad!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

"I know it, lad; I know it! For a second—why, by gad, sir!"

Mr. Strong turned from the window.

"What's the matter, Roger?" he asked.

Marian, seeing traces of tears upon his cheeks—and guessing well the reason—affectionately took his hand and pressed it to her lips. But her eyes were staring, somewhat fearfully, at the Colonel, who cleared his throat, looked at her steadily, and answered:

"Nothing, Amos."

"I—I'd better be going now," Jeb suggested, "for Aunt Sallie and Aunt Veemie will want to hear the news."

"Tell them the town will be proud of you, my boy," Mr. Strong gave him a salute; and the Colonel, in his enthusiasm forgetting he had harbored a doubt of Jeb, shouted:

"And tell 'em I wouldn't be surprised if some day we put up a monument to you! When a fellow charges through hails of bullets, each singing him a lullaby, he never knows what instant one will come 'chunk!' into his stomach! Gad, but it's a great game! I envy you, boy! And I'm going to teach you all I know, so you'll be

the best prepared officer that ever stepped on foreign soil. You'll know how to lean low while charging, sir, to escape some of the fire—for a man can keep on going with a hole in his arm, or leg, or maybe his face, but protect your stomach, sir! A hole through it brings on nausea, and nine times out of ten you'll have to sit down. Officers don't sit down, sir, till they're knocked down for keeps!"

Jeb had walked to the door, using all of his will power to shut out these words which had so nearly snapped the last thread of his waning courage. Thus far, he felt assured, no one in the room had suspected the turmoil that had well nigh driven him frantic. It was not cowardice, he told himself; merely a loss of self-control—for how could a chap remain calm while the old Colonel was shooting his stomach full of holes? His quick perception of situations made it clear that his exit now must remove whatever vestige of doubt there might have existed in the minds of those behind him, and, turning at the threshold, he laughed boisterously:

"I'll remember everything, Colonel! You

just teach me how to do it, and between us the Huns'll get all their hides can hold!" He slammed the door, and was gone.

"I'd forgotten you were such a bloodthirsty old wildcat, Roger," Mr. Strong began to laugh.

"You've had no cause to," the Colonel looked humorously across at him. "But my bark in this case was worse than my bite. I merely wanted to stir the young man's ardor so that he'll be the more keen for a smell of powder. Did you note his eyes sparkling, Amos?—did you, Marian?"

Marian had not stirred during the Colonel's admonitions to Jeb. She had been sitting limply in her father's desk chair, looking at the targets which lay crumpled and forgotten beneath the table. Now she answered listlessly:

"Yes, I noticed it."

Her tone, as well as her attitude, caught the Colonel's attention and sobered him. He glanced toward Amos Strong, who had again turned to the window and, with hands crossed behind his back, was gazing down into the street; then whispered guardedly:

"You mustn't jump at conclusions, my dear

little girl. Jeb's the soul of honor, and of courage; he's just a mite unstrung, that's all—why shouldn't he be?"

"Why do you think I'm jumping at conclusions?" she asked, smiling at him. "He ought to make a very fine soldier, and I'm sure he will."

"He will, indeed," the old fellow patted her cheek. "And now let me beg of you, for your dear father's sake, to let the honor of Hillsdale rest with Jeb, and you stay home here with us!"

"Oh, I couldn't stay home," she moved restlessly. "Don't put your plea on old daddy's account—it isn't fair! He has you, now," she added, trying to smile bravely. "Why, Uncle Roger, I was counting on you to support me!"

"There, there! I will, I will! When do you want to start?"

"To-day," she answered, again listlessly.

"To-day?" he cried in astonishment. "Why, my dear child——"

She sprang to her feet, fighting back tears, and faced him.

"Certainly to-day," she said quickly. "Aren't men falling to-day?—suffering and crying for help to-day? Are the Germans going

to stop firing until I get there?—or any of us can get there? Don't you see the sooner everyone gets busy the sooner it will be over?—and can't you see that I—I can't stay here a minute longer than is absolutely necessary?" She looked down again at the fallen targets, and a little shiver seemed to pass over her; then she crossed to her father, tiptoed behind him and put her arms around his neck. "Your promise, Daddy?" she asked, tenderly.

He wheeled, almost savagely, and gathered her close to him, saying huskily:

"Your daddy never went back on a promise, dear."

"Damn those Hun outcasts!" the Colonel thundered, stamping from the room and banging the door after him.

CHAPTER III

Jeb had stepped out upon the street with heavy feet. There was a dull weight at his heart; a sickening weariness permeated his entire body. The Colonel's words of warning to protect his stomach, the suggestion of bullets ploughing through it, caused him to stop and loosen his belt, which had begun to feel uncomcomfortable. He even ran his hand over that part of his anatomy and found that it seemed actually to be tender.

"What the hell's the matter with me?" he asked himself. "I'm no coward; there hasn't been a coward in my family since the Crusade. No, it's the Colonel's eternal cackling that's got my goat!"

Heartened somewhat, he continued at a faster pace and soon turned through the side gate, thence across the porch into the Tumpson home.

Miss Sallie's voice from upstairs greeted him.

"Back safe, Jeb?"

The tenderness of her inquiry, subtly—though unintentionally—suggesting that the manor lord had returned and therefore the womenfolk must haste with ministering, greatly restored his self-esteem. Again the sword began to lose its tarnish; again it flashed in his hand with zest; again in imagination his company stepped off with the precision of regulars!

"War's declared," he shouted. "Colonel Hampton and Mr. Strong have patched up their fuss, and are going to recruit a company and make me captain. We'll be smashing the Germans inside a month!"

He wondered at the strength with which these last words were spoken, and was on the point of repeating them because their sound had caressed his pride, when Miss Sallie gave a cry.

"Sister Veemie," she called, "come with me quickly! War is declared, and our Jeb has been appointed to lead the soldiers! Oh, what shall become of us!"

The last symptoms of trepidation lingering in his make-up now disappeared entirely, and it

was a tall, proud, imperious officer who stood in the front hall waiting for the little ladies who, hand-in-hand, came timidly down. Without speaking, Miss Veemie crossed to where he stood. She did not seem to walk, but glide, so smooth and gentle was her movement and the flow of her wide, rather old-fashioned skirt. Tiptoeing and putting her arms around his neck, she simply whispered:

"Jeb!"

"Pshaw, Aunt Veemie," he said, feeling delightfully heroic, "it isn't anything to take on about. We're at war, and at it for keeps!—that's all there is to it! I've been honored with a captaincy, and we'll be in France before July Fourth, and in Berlin by Thanksgiving. Think of that!"

Miss Sallie caught his sleeve.

"Oh, Jeb," she cried, "if your dear father had lived to hear you speak thus spiritedly!"

"We're so proud of you, dear," Miss Veemie whispered, her eyes gazing up at him through tears of adulation. "You'll try not to get hurt, won't you?" She admonished simply from force of habit.

It might have been a war god who dined in their home that evening. He was seated in Jeb's place, and on either side of him sat a seamed though gentle handmaiden, missing no opportunity to load his plate with good things. Their faded cheeks were tinged with a glow that had not been there in many years, their eyes sparkled with an almost forgotten light, and the lace on their narrow-breasted bodices rose and fell with an agitation that required at times a delicate hand to still.

The talk was of war, and Jeb handled the subject to his entire satisfaction. His highly strung mind drew pictures that more and more stirred their admiration—and horror. Working upon fragments of fact that from day to day had been printed in the *Eagle,* he built a structure of sacrifice and slaughter from which he alone arose supreme. It was a dramatic dissertation and contained red-blooded sentiments that would have done credit to a man who had actually played the giant game, swapped trick for trick with death, and won out by sheer luck.

Curiously enough, he believed himself; he believed that his moment of weakness earlier in

the day had now passed into the limbo of things never to be resurrected; he believed that his courage was absolute, that no terrors were great enough to shake it. The ancient Egyptians brought a skeleton to their feasts to remind them of death, but Jeb's apparent familiarity with carnage seemed to be giving him new life.

A man may think he possesses a determined belief, yet unless he has energy and faith enough to test it he is harboring little more than a wish, a hope. If he is downright honest he will not permit himself to be deceived—but the trouble is that hopes which he wishes were beliefs, and wishes that he hopes will become beliefs, are blindfolds deliberately placed across his eyes to spare him an unrestricted vision of his naked soul. This is the most common type of cowardice in the world.

The brave words Jeb uttered were most agreeable to his senses; they fed the hole that should have been filled with courage, and he therefore plunged onward into the realm of imageries until the little ladies felt that they had never really known their Jeb. Certain were

they that his manliness had received a most inadequate appreciation.

Dinner over, he left them for the quietude of the garden. Back and forth upon the path, bordered by wee budding tulips, he walked with springing steps. His gaze was in the laced branches overhead, a tangle that broke the calm flood of moonlight into silver patches and scattered them over the ground. Back and forth across these he strode—one moment in sharp outline, the next obscurred—thinking, dreaming. He would not stop to hear the unspoken message of this place, whispering to him everywhere that the intricate mesh of branches represented Fear, through which the pulseless courage shed upon man from God is shattered. He would not see, in the tiny green tips pushing through the earth, that man's blooming into perfection is a slow process, dependent upon the cultivation of his soul. In this night of his greatest promise, he asked only to live with dreams.

The soil surrounding Jeb's progress thus far in life had been prepared by his two adoring aunts with very much the same care they be-

stowed on their tulips. After he was put into their hands at the age of four, neither their time, nor thought, nor means were spared in forcing his development. But while Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie could intensify the development of a tulip, it might not be said that they knew anything about boys. To a critical eye—had it watched Jeb now walking this way and that as a restive animal—the fruit of their labor would without doubt have been pronounced satisfactory; yet only in a visual sense could he have been called animal. So far as concerned temperament he was merely a fretful peri locked up in a cage of flowers—for how in the name of all creation had it been possible for Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie, sole proprietresses of this male machine, to make him properly masculine!

Within the dining-room there were no dreams. As he had passed out, the little ladies remained silent for several minutes. Slowly Miss Sallie raised her eyes and looked at her sister, then sharply exclaimed:

"Don't be a fool, now, Veemie!"

"I can't help it," the other choked. "It's an outrage for the Colonel to have selected Jeb

to do all those horrid things! He's nothing but a boy!"

Miss Sallie was seldom out of patience with her more tender sister, yet at this moment her love and her patriotism—by which is meant her heart and soul—were violently in conflict. Fearing lest the former might prevail, she replied with greater asperity:

"Well, be a fool if you must, but for pity sake don't let Jeb see you! He's no boy any more; since this morning he's grown into a big, mature man!—just the kind we need to end this horrible war! As for Marian, she'll be glad enough to wait for him!"

Miss Sallie appeared not to see her sister rise hurriedly and leave the room; but she waited, listening, until a door upstairs slammed, then called softly to their maid:

"Be sure that Mr. Jeb's room is right!"

With this nightly admonition she went on tiptoe to her own room and locked herself in. Until well nigh daylight a far-seeing God gazed tenderly into the upturned faces of two women whose souls writhed in an agony of pleading.

CHAPTER IV

When Jeb opened his eyes next morning, rather heavy after a scanty sleep, he did not at once remember the great change that had come into his life. He vaguely knew something had happened; then suddenly the captaincy loomed ahead, startling him as though it were an exploding bomb. There was nothing imaginary about this, and he lay awhile considering it.

The same unpleasant weight crept over him; his heart beat rapidly, and his body seemed to be very hollow. Unceasing panoramas of heroism cast on his mental screen were one thing, but the military company in the broad daylight of cold, hard fact did not appeal to him at all. Embarking for a distant shore where men were torn by shells, where the ground was slippery with the blood of countless thousands, where a fellow's chances of getting back alive were, so he pictured it, one in a million, brought a dis-

tinct feeling of panic. He could see the air literally filled with bursting shrapnel, while red-hot bullets from machine-guns swept the earth as clean as a scythe goes through the ripening wheat. Man simply could not endure in a hell like that! It was utterly impossible!

For a little while he gained a modicum of comfort by swearing at the Administration, the President, the Cabinet. What right had they to declare war, anyhow? Now, if we were going to fight Mexico!—or if the Germans tried to come over *here!*—well, that would be a different proposition!

The usual tonic of his bath, a shave, fresh clothes and breakfast began to improve the situation, but he was still desperately depressed. The adoring solicitude of his aunts—more tender after their night of prayerful and palpitating concentration—helped but little.

"Where are you going this morning, dear?" Miss Sallie, trying to seem natural, asked as he arose from the table. Miss Veemie repeated the question with a look, not trusting herself to speak.

"Oh," he answered, with that indifference

which is intended to imply the highest type of courage—but never does unless the courage is there!—"I suppose I ought to run downtown and see if the War Department has answered about our uniforms and rifles. Then I'll stop by for a game of tennis with Marian."

Miss Veemie, still silent, closed her eyes as though shutting out a reality that her prayers had been unable to dissolve. Her sister became busy taking up and putting down into their same places the sideboard silver. Jeb felt an undeniable interest in the uniforms and rifles, looking forward to them very much as a condemned man might view a gallows. Nevertheless, after he had walked halfway to the *Eagle* office, the mood sufficiently passed for him to enter with a certain amount of *savoir faire.*

The Colonel had been there since eight o'clock, properly ensconced behind a table especially placed for him. A ledger for recruits' names lay open, with pens and ink-pot ready. Mr. Strong had not yet come down; neither had a man thus far been recruited, although the *Eagle's* story was setting Hillsdale aflame with patriotism.

"Any news?" Jeb asked, shaking hands.

"No, sir," the Colonel answered, leaning near the window to glance up at the courthouse clock. "But our telegrams have been received, and the War Department is doubtless busily packing the things at this moment. They ought to reach here to-morrow, without fail, if sent by express —as they will be sent, of course. In times of war, Jeb, materials have to move quickly, remember that! It was the secret of Stonewall Jackson's greatest strength—and of Napoleon's. They moved like meteors!"

To-morrow! This brought the crisis so close that Jeb sat down and drew a long breath. The old gentleman watched him for a moment, then in a voice of tenderness asked:

"Did you know that Marian leaves to-night? Her father is going with her as far as New York."

"Leaves for where?" Jeb exclaimed, straightening up.

"For France, of course! Where else would she be leaving for at a time like this? Her father burned the wires last night; although I know how each message burned more

deeply into his heart! They leave here about midnight."

Jeb remained silent, crushed by feelings of self-condemnation. How was it that she possessed the courage to go, and he did not! The Colonel, divining a different type of depression and wanting to cheer him up, cried good humoredly:

"Here, sir! Before giving yourself over to moonings, just sign this page; then you'll belong to your government body and soul! Your name should be the first, anyhow!"

He held out the pen, but Jeb did not appear to see it. Instead, he arose abruptly, saying:

"I'll—I'll have to attend to something first," and he hurried out.

"I'll sign it for you," the Colonel called; adding to himself, as he chuckled merrily: "Gone after Marian, the young cub!"

But Jeb was after nothing but to escape that terrifying page which suddenly appeared to him as a chamber of horrors; he heard nothing now but the Colonel's promise to sign it by proxy, and an outraged voice within which called him to look upon the courage of a girl.

They were driving him mad. He turned toward the open country, walking fast, but as one who walks in sleep. Many tried to stop him, to congratulate him on the good fortune of being a captain, but he rudely passed with scarcely a word. Some looked after him, and a few complained rather knowingly:

"That's the trouble with militarism; it makes the officers so stuck up!"

On and on he went, to the wood where he had killed imaginary Germans; and there, throwing himself on the ground, he began to fight another, a very much more real battle.

In the meanwhile, long before the courthouse clock struck the hour of noon, the Colonel had filled many pages of his ledger. Marian and her father had come down, being afraid to leave each other during these last few hours they would have together. The Colonel had told of Jeb's brief visit, adding his own belief that the lad had gone out to the Strong residence; and Marian took a seat by the window, where she could watch the street and at the same time greet each recruit who entered to put his name down on the company roster.

Despite the nearness of her departure, Mr. Strong and Colonel Hampton were almost joyous as they noted the happy, though firm, looks of determination radiating from the faces of men who came in streams to offer the best they had.

The barber's assistant followed Hillsdale's most promising young lawyer; the driver of Hincky's grocery wagon reached the door simultaneously with the rising banker, and Mr. Strong felt a catch of pleasure at his throat when the financier, stepping aside and putting a hand on the driver's shoulder, said:

"After you, old fellow!"

An Italian bootblack from the hotel-stand looked in, asking shyly:

"You tak'a me?"

A woman in a faded dress brought her husky lad who twisted his hat with awkward fingers.

"He ain't quite twenty-one," she said, in a low voice, "so I come to give consent. He wants to go, thank God!—an' I can git along."

Colonel Hampton sprang up and embraced them both in one sweep of his long arms; and,

when the woman cried a little, Marian soothed her with endearing words of praise.

Hillsdale, one way or another, was responding to its country's need. During the day the recruiting list grew past the four-hundred mark—but, although Marian's eyes grew tired gazing down upon those who were coming and going in the street, nowhere did she get a glimpse of Jeb.

There had been neither time nor thought of luncheon, and during a lull, about the middle of the afternoon, she arose wearily, saying:

"I think I'll go home now, and pack."

Both of the old gentlemen turned and looked at her mutely, their eyes expressive of pain; for in the excitement of recruiting they had temporarily forgotten the nearness of her leaving.

"Don't be sad," she smiled, bending over her father. "You'll have me for several more days!" The Colonel, who for once forgot his gallantry and remained seated, she kissed upon the forehead, murmuring: "I won't say goodbye to you now, Uncle Roger, because I know you'll be down at the train to-night. But you'll

promise me to take care of daddy, won't you? And Daddy," she turned, making a brave effort to laugh, "you promise to take care of Uncle Roger, too!"

She realized that were either of them to attempt a word they would make a sorry showing, and this would throw her into a torrential storm of tears. Of all three in the editor's office, her shoulders carried the heaviest burden. Each of the men was losing but one whom he loved; she was losing two—and, besides these two, there was Jeb! Jeb, who had thought more of his targets than of her return!—Jeb, who had not signed the company roster, although over four hundred of Hillsdale's men had come in gladly! She patted the Colonel's head and threw a hurried kiss to her father, then was gone.

"I've never been more proud of her," the Colonel said, beginning to cough; and there was a huskiness in the editor's throat as he replied:

"I wish her dear mother could have lived to share our pride, Roger."

When at sundown the Colonel, closing his

ledger with a bang, announced the time was up, Mr. Strong took his arm and drew him gently from the chair.

"I don't make a practice of this, Roger," he said, "but I think we're entitled to stop by the hotel for a small—er——"

About this time a man, deep in a distant wood, turned wearily over on the ground. His hair was disordered, and there were signs of suffering in his face. A close observer would have noticed that his finger nails were dirty, not from personal untidyness but because, while in some mental anguish, they had been dug into the earth.

As wearily as he had turned, he now arose, swaying slightly from his long prostrate position. Then he started cityward, at the same moment that Colonel Hampton and Mr. Strong were touching glasses, with an unspoken toast, to the health and safety of a girl who personified the fighting spirit of America.

Long after Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie had retired that night Jeb sat in the garden, a prey to desperate thoughts. When, far across the undulating landscape, he heard the long, low

whistle of an express that would stop at Hillsdale, he arose and went slowly, with hesitating steps, to the station. Mr. Strong and Marian and the Colonel were there when he came within the circle of light; and, to his surprise, they greeted him warmly—for he had feared this meeting, and would have been almost glad to avoid it. Within his own conscience he had been so pitilessly accused that it seemed as though every man and woman must accuse him, also.

Through the silence of that midnight hour they stood, speaking nervously, oppressed by the torturing heaviness which accompanies such partings. With an effort Marian turned to him suddenly:

"When will you be coming over, Jeb?"

He was expecting this question; before leaving the garden he knew to a certainty that it would be asked, and now answered promptly:

"I wish I were going with you to-night! But you're lucky in having had your training, while mine is still to come. You can look for me, though, just as soon as we can get the company in shape!"

"By gad," the Colonel exclaimed.

"Oh, Jeb," Marian leaned impulsively toward him, "you can't possibly know how happy that makes me!"

The rails were beginning to hum, and a glaring headlight shot into view. It was but a matter of seconds then before the brake-shoes ground upon the metal wheels—another few seconds for hasty adieux—and the train was off again.

Jeb and the Colonel watched the two red signal lights growing smaller, until shut out by a curve; but they continued to stand, listening to the rumble as it faded into the distance—into the dawn of a new world, where the souls of men were calling, and from which the souls of slackers stood back in fear!

When the last faint sound had become lost, and the purity of the night was undisturbed, the two saddened men turned by mutual consent and walked slowly homeward.

CHAPTER V

THREE days later Mr. Strong returned and took up his duties with stoic bravery. Marian had sailed with a unit happening to be in need of nurses, and by now, he told the Colonel, she must be far out upon the ocean. Each time the telegraph operator entered the anxious father's heart stood still—for there were nests of conscienceless submarines waiting for just such prey! But the cable came at last announcing: "Safe. Quickly front." It required no translation to know that she was doubtless at that moment speeding on her mission of mercy to the trenches. For an hour the two old men sat without speaking, moodily staring out of the window.

No word came from Washington, other than a polite note from the Congressman which stated that books, such as he presumed the gentlemen wanted, were much in demand but would

be sent if procurable. From the War Department—nothing!

At the expiration of another week, however, the official envelope arrived. In warm terms its writer appreciated the patriotism of Hillsdale, but regretted that uniforms and rifles were not being issued just at present to organizations such as the gallant company in question. The Colonel had inserted that word "gallant" when reading this at a meeting called for the purpose, assuaging his conscience with the excuse of civic necessity. He pointed out, also, that the equipment was tentatively promised—if one chose to interpret the letter in this way; and, of course, everyone did so choose. Then came another wait through which the Colonel and Mr. Strong grew more and more depressed. For hours they would sit in semi-silence, intermittently exchanging thoughts of Marian and Jeb.

Since Jeb's name had been entered on the roster book he felt chained to a slowly gnawing torture, for any train might bring over an army man to administer the oaths of allegiance, and there would then be no escape. But as weeks passed and nothing happened he began to

breathe more hopefully. The depression, born of fear, was wearing off, while the self-satisfied conceit slunk back into its former place. It would have been safe to say that Jeb was close to normal.

This respite, however, took a precipitate tumble one morning when he received word to come at once to the office. As he entered, Mr. Strong and the Colonel looked up with serious faces.

"There isn't any bad news from Marian?" he asked, breathlessly.

They shook their heads. But he saw that something serious had happened, and guessed in a flash that the dreaded time was at hand! With a rush all the old fear surged back to torture him.

"Jeb," the editor said, pointing to a chair, "we've decided your best chance lies in the Reserve Officers' Corps. If you're ready now, we'll help you make out the papers and see that you get properly fixed up."

"Chance of a lifetime, Jeb," the Colonel enthusiastically cried. "Training, commission, fighting with the first contingent that goes over! I congratulate you, sir!"

"But—but what about the company?" he faltered, feeling the world wobble and reel.

"Company the devil, sir! Amos and I don't believe the Department intends sending us the stuff! No, sir, they've doubtless settled on this other scheme."

Only for a moment did Jeb hesitate, and then he arose supreme. His face was white, his eyes blazed as fire, his voice became pinched and high with emotion. Never, he declared, would he turn back from the duty toward which he had set his will! That duty was to his comrades in Hillsdale, who had paid him the high compliment of dedicating their lives to his leadership. Desert them now, when the first opportunity came for personal advancement, and he would be a traitor to all mankind! If, merely for the love of fighting, he could so far forget these confiding fellows, how could he ever look them in the eyes again!

The truth of the matter was that Jeb worked himself into a frenzy of oratory which convinced in spite of logic. He was pleading desperately for Jeb, for Jeb's hide, for Jeb's life. Having no suspicion of this the two old gentlemen lis-

tened with rapture expressed in their moistening eyes, and when he concluded, out of breath but defiant, they sprang up and embraced him.

"By gad, sir," the Colonel cried, "you made the shades of eloquence, from Webster to Demosthenes, sit up and cock their ears! Amos, when this war's over we'll run him for the senate, eh?"

So the Officers' Reserve Corps was laid upon the shelf. Other men in Hillsdale applied for it; some were ordered to report at the training camp of their divisional area; but, for Jeb, the dark angel of torture had again passed by.

At breakfast one morning, opening the *Eagle,* his blood congealed into fine particles of ice. His head whirled, his body became sick in every part. Leaving abruptly he went into the garden and there read, painfully read, the big headlines and their accompanying story.

The draft! Drafting between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one—and he was twenty-six! He could not have been more in the center, in the very bull's-eye, of the age selection! With all his senses in a panic, his mind darted this way and that, seeking, as a trapped rat,

some avenue of exit; but on every side, so far as years counted, he was equally hemmed in. A moment of fury took the place of fear, wherein he cursed and raved against a government, calling itself paternal, that would play fast and loose with its people's lives; but at last he fell into a dull brooding, tinged with physical and mental nausea.

He was aroused by a voice, and looked up to behold the Colonel's head and shoulders above the picket fence. The old gentleman's face was grave and his well-known Stetson had been pulled lower to his eyes.

"I thought I'd find you," he was saying. "Walk down to my office with me."

Since the sixth of April, now almost two months passed, the Colonel had referred to the table in Mr. Strong's editorial sanctum as his office; not alone because it pleased him so to do, but equally because his friend would tolerate no other arrangement. Never having possessed an office of any kind, he felt that it added dignity to his declining years; and there, each morning, he would re-check the names on his recruiting ledger, besides writing suggestions

—some very good suggestions—to the War Department. If the young Martian clerks, working like bees in that august building at Sixteenth and Pennsylvania Avenue, grew into the habit of unopening fat envelopes postmarked "Hillsdale" until the very last moment, they learned to do so after a manner of self-protection—but had the Colonel suspected this he would have gone forthwith and flourished his cane, not only over their heads, but over the heads of their heads, even unto the Mr. Secretary of War himself.

"I'm unhappy about you, Jeb," he said, as they fell into stride.

Jeb, having reached a state of mind wherein he expected at any moment to be called a coward, felt his body stiffen as if to receive a blow. He had become ashamed even to inquire for news of Marian, during these last few days, as the contrast of their characters was a thing he preferred keeping in the background. He now looked stolidly at the pavement, and asked:

"What about?"—but the words were huskily inarticulate and he repeated them, this time in a louder voice: "What about?"

"Oh, everything," the old gentleman answered. "Your splendid loyalty to the company that won't be formed has robbed you of a place in other branches of the service which by this time would have meant much to you, and I'm afraid now it's too late to recover the lost ground." He failed to notice that his young friend drew a breath of relief, or that he stepped out with greater confidence. "You might be training this minute, Jeb, were it not for my vain desire to put you quickly in a place of command! I am greatly distressed—greatly to be blamed!"

"Please don't say that, sir," Jeb turned to him quickly, yet with more pleasure than solicitude in his voice. "There'll be a second camp, and I won't lose anything in the long run. Even if I never get to go at all, Colonel. I've the satisfaction of having tried—that is, I *will* have tried; which, along with your kindness, is more than a compensation."

He meant this. He saw an opportunity, moreover, to beat the draft by giving out ahead of time his determination to attend the second training camp. It had not before occurred to

him, because he had been too mentally paralyzed to think clearly. Now a suspicion which once had flickered in his mind came back with renewed vigor: that a kind of Fate was watching his career. It had steered him safely past the home company, and later had steered through rapids that might easily have dashed him against the first training camp. At present it was pointing to a secret passage of escape from conscription. To-day, he figured rapidly, was the thirty-first of May; the second camp would not open until August the twenty-seventh. Oh, lots of things could happen in three months! Jeb had not felt quite so hopeful since the declaration of war, and launched a flow of pyrotechnical sentiments which warmed the Colonel's blood.

This wordy recklessness continued while they turned into the *Eagle* building and ascended to the "office." Mr. Strong looked up smilingly as they entered, and the Colonel, standing with legs apart, pushed back his hat, exclaiming:

"Amos, Jeb has in him, I declare, sir, the spirit of the old days! He'll make a record, sir, of which we'll be proud; and also make those

wretched Huns take water or I don't know a soldier! Rather than feel depressed because our planning has thus far kept him away from the Colors, he's confidently and happily looking forward to the second training camp for officers, sir. Incidentally this will spare him the odium—the odium, sir—of being drafted like a common slacker!"

"I'd die if I were drafted," Jeb put in. "I don't see how drafted men can face their own kind, much less the enemy!"

"You're right," the Colonel thundered. "Such a system saps our manhood! I thank God, Amos, that in the old days men responded to the call without being driven like a herd of moral lepers!"

"Not so fast, not so fast," Mr. Strong began to laugh at them. "In the old days, Roger, we owed our successes at arms to luck, rather than to a finely organized army. Washington couldn't have whipped the British without France; we couldn't have held our own with them again in 1812 if they hadn't been up to their ears in the Peninsular War, and unable to send anything like an equal force over here to

engage us. It's the truth, Roger, and we lose nothing by admitting it! The Mexican War was a vastly superior power against a little one, and the same condition prevailed when we tackled Spain. Only once in our history did we find it necessary to draft, and that was when we fought an antagonist—I will not say an enemy—in every way our equal; that, Roger," he laid his hand on the Colonel's arm and spoke tenderly, "was when we fought you."

The Colonel looked out of the window. His eyes blinked several times before he replied, in the same gentle voice:

"By gad, Amos, you did have to draft then, didn't you!"

"We did, and I'm frank to say we should have done so in every war before and after. It's the only fair way, and the only efficient way! But aside from what we should have done, today we're fighting neither Mexico nor Spain. We're fighting a blood-glutted monster whose breath is poisonous gas, whose touch is fever, whose thoughts are leprous. This is too serious an emergency to trust in the hands of a fallacious volunteer system! The Government, by which I

mean ourselves, must look to its knitting with an alertness never before found necessary, or this time we perish. And I want to tell you, Roger, with all solemnity, that there may be a score of legitimate reasons why a young man should not volunteer, but none to caste dishonor on his endraftment. This nation merely says to its young fighting men, 'Step up, my sons!'—then, all who should fight, will; and those who should not, won't! There is no way more fair; there is no way more honorable! So do not re-utter your sentiments, either of you!"

"I expect you're right," the Colonel murmured.

"I know I am. And you'll realize it next Tuesday, Roger, when you see what fine types of young fellows come before you to be registered. I put you down as a registrar," he added, "because I am to be one, also."

"Thank goodness I won't have to register," Jeb said contentedly. "I'm going to the second camp."

"You'll have to register, all the same, Jeb," the editor turned to him. "All men in the age must do that."

"But how about the second camp?"

"There's some talk of taking no men in the second camp who are in the draft age. Youngsters like you are wanted for the rank and file."

Mr. Strong turned to his desk and began opening mail, else he might have read Jeb's secret at a glance. The Colonel, blissfully ignorant, leaned over the ledger and began for the hundredth time to check off the extinct roster, saying with resignation:

"That sounds reasonable, Amos; and, since there's no odium attached to a drafted man, it may be all the greater achievement in the long run when Jeb has worked himself up from the ranks. He'll be a better officer for it."

"When is this registration?" Jeb tried to make his voice sound natural.

"Next Tuesday," Mr. Strong answered over his shoulder. The Colonel was still preoccupied and did not look up. The next moment Jeb slipped out and turned, dizzily, into Main street.

CHAPTER VI

For the remainder of that week Jeb was an ill man. He could neither eat nor sleep, but paced restlessly about the garden, sometimes going far into the country and coming home exhausted. He did not realize that his panic-stricken mind was showing signs of its agony, or that his aunts were becoming greatly alarmed. But Sunday morning Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie held a consultation and decided to call Doctor Purdy—a gruff, good-natured friend of the family, who not infrequently dropped in for a cup of tea. This time he found his patient in the garden and was soon walking arm in arm with him. Later he rejoined the ladies on the front porch.

"Is it serious?" they asked, in a breath.

"Um," he answered, pursing his lips and looking out across the lawn, "no."

They did not suspect that Doctor Purdy was

utterly in the dark about Jeb's ailment; nor that in a general way he had diagnosed it to be love or debt, judging solely from a very evident depression. Neither did the man of medicine guess how dangerously ill in mind his patient had become; for Jeb, in the darkest hours of these days, during which he was imminently faced with conscription—meaning to him a hell of hells in a foreign battlefield—had so worked himself into an hysteria that personal injury seemed the easiest and only solution to his suffering. Were he to shoot off his finger, for instance, he would not be drafted! He had read of this being done in other countries! Or, he might point the rifle at his foot—but that, perhaps, would be a needless sacrifice.

He had thought it carefully out, and had been actually on the point of deciding when the old physician appeared. Then Doctor Purdy, reading in his eyes the very image of despair, left good suggestions as the best medicine he then knew to bolster him up. The consequence was that Jeb, instead of resorting to wounds, settled on a better plan: he would become more ill, grow worse and worse, so that by Tuesday the

doctor might carry a certificate to the registration place exempting him from service. He brightened wonderfully after this; he really became a hopeful looking invalid for one who intended to flirt shamelessly with death. He almost laughed. His appetite returned, and it was a hard knock for him to take to his bed instead of sitting down at the sumptuous feast which he knew Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie had provided. But bed it must be, and no dinner.

News of his illness had got abroad somewhat, and during the afternoon the Colonel and Mr. Strong called. When Miss Veemie, out of breath, came up to tell him this he expressed a feeble wish to see them, arranging himself deeper in the pillows and trying to remain calm.

"Well, sir," said the Colonel jovially, "this is no place for a soldier! The time will come, doubtless, when we'll be dropping by to see you tucked in white sheets, but then you'll have a leg off, or half your head! You'll be a battle-scarred veteran, then!"

The light was not strong enough for any of them to have seen the effect of this encouraging

speech, but Jeb acquiesced feebly, adding a weak desire that the prophecy might come true. This sentiment, just at this time, did not escape the Colonel, who looked for the merest instant startled—then put an unworthy thought aside as the invalid concluded:

"I'm awfully sorry I won't be out Tuesday to register."

"Don't let that worry you, my boy," Mr. Strong leaned gently over and spoke to him. "The War Department has provided for those who happen to be ill, so you won't miss it; we promise to see to that, eh, Roger?"

"He's in my district," the generous Colonel answered, "so I'll come by here first thing Tuesday morning and fill out his card. Why, it'll be a pleasure, Jeb!"

Where was the good fairy, the kind Fate, now that had stood between him and this war horror! He felt limp and willing to lie still awhile; but as soon as the guests had left he sprang up and feverishly paced the floor.

Had he possessed one chum, to whom he could pour out this agony and who in turn could have jolted him back into a normal perspective, Jeb

might have faced the issue with coolness and even gladness, as millions of other fellows were doing. But he had started wrong, and the farther he stumbled down the wrong road the harder it was to struggle back. Each hour he had let himself be confronted with agonizing thoughts of pain and death—strangling in the cruel embrace of the one, or being drawn whimpering into the mysterious uncertainty of the other; vivid prospects, these, that drew him into a state of dumb hysteria. He loathed himself, he loathed everything about him, until the untoward tomorrows were nearly effaced by the self-torment of todays. To be caught between the two was an endless terror—since tomorrows are always tomorrows, and todays face us with every dawn. Trembling at the uncertainties ahead, he longed for that peace which is only found in the finalities of yesterdays. With anguished eyes he peered into the future, and wrung his hands impotently.

When he heard Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie coming up to say goodnight, he slipped between the sheets and remained impassive while they fussed about, touching the pillow here or pat-

ting the coverlet there. At last, alone for the night, he crossed silently to the door and locked it; then drew a chair to the window and gazed moodily out into the trees, one of whose branches brushed the sill on which he leaned.

There was an agitation in the leaves that seemed to whisper eerie things to him; they were stirred by some invisible emotion—by fear, he thought. To his mind all nature was trembling before the great human sacrifice about to be demanded of this fair land; and he imagined other trees, forests upon forests of them, vines, flowers, grasses—aye, mountains and gorges, even—being obsessed by this same dumb shivering. "The world is shivering," he whispered. He was shivering! How long, he wondered, must it be before this quietly shivering world would burst into a raging frenzy, as these trees within touch of him had been whipped by storms of unbridled passion! He recalled a storm in the previous summer, when green leaves torn from their stems were driven before the hurricane and plastered on these very window panes above his head. He likened it to a man-made fury, wherein pieces of human body

would be blown about with the same unrelenting indifference.

By eight o'clock next morning Jeb was on his way downtown. Although his face was white and somewhat drawn, the illness had disappeared; he had eaten a man's size breakfast and declared himself to be fit. The shivers that earlier made a playground of his frame were quiet; their elements were present, but scattered by a resolution that was now driving him onward—and well nigh driving him mad!

Turning into the *Eagle* building he walked stolidly to the editor's room and entered. As he had hoped, Mr. Strong was not there, and only the Colonel arose, crying with outstretched hands:

"A soldier's recovery, on my word, sir! Jeb, you rebound like a rubber ball—I'm proud of you!"

"You mustn't be proud of me," he replied slowly, not looking into the honest face that smiled at him. "I am not fit to be proud of."

The words might have been taken for extreme modesty, but the tone fell unpleasantly on the

Colonel's ears. He recognized, or thought he recognized, something that had its root in this young man before him; not merely an expression of the moment. For an instant his keen eyes bored into the averted face, causing Jeb to look up rather defiantly.

"Colonel," he said jerkily, "tomorrow is draft day. I'm afraid of it; I'm a—a——" then it burst in a tone of desperation, "—a coward, sir!"

The office was perfectly still for nearly a minute, during which the Colonel's scrutinizing gaze never faltered. He would have been vacuous indeed to ask if this thing were a joke, for Jeb's whole attitude condemned him. But the old gentleman was not the type who easily surrendered the honor of his friends, and when he spoke his words came haltingly, as though he were weighing this damning statement against all that had formerly been good; he was unwilling to pronounce a verdict on the bare face value of such an accusation without throwing into the balance, not only Jeb's character since boyhood, but the affectionate memory of his father.

"It takes a brave man to say that, Jeb, and you've certainly shown no cowardice thus far. I prefer to think that you are mistaking a new situation, a strange sensation, for this more unworthy thing—I won't name it, sir!"

Whatever the hope to which Colonel Hampton clung, he could no longer doubt Jeb's earnestness nor his sanity. He saw that this son of his dead friend was speaking a horrible truth which he, himself, could not possibly understand. And then he seemed suddenly to have aged, to have grown old in a moment.

Sometimes an autumn will progress far while still holding the bounteous greens of summer; the skies will have tempered their chill to trees and grass, and even scattered wild flowers will retain their bloom. But, one night, something taps upon the window pane. Faster, faster, like metallic clicks of a speeding-up machine, the sleet rattles for a little while, and lo! where are the leaves, the flowers, of yesterday! Thus did the Colonel age at this quick approach of blighting cold which the optimism of his nature was impotent to withstand. Yet he was still unwilling to give up the fight. Jeb was afraid,

not a coward! There lay a vast difference between these, and he said hopefully:

"Get this in your mind, Jeb: bravery is the absence of fear, but courage is the ability to overcome fear! It's no disgrace to be afraid; it's only a disgrace to be a slave to fear. The man who possesses one pound of fear and two pounds of courage, is a lion; reverse this order and you have—that other thing, which I won't believe you are! Why, boy, I remember my first experience well! My regiment was behind a hill, waiting the word that would send us charging into action—and a red-hot fight they said it would be, too! I was leaning on my rifle in the most nonchalant attitude of indifference, but the truth was that if it hadn't been for that prop my knees would have crumpled up. You're the first man I ever told this to, and I wouldn't now unless I thought it would help you. That was the most unhappy moment in my life; but, like all troubles, it appeared to be much greater at a distance. Once in action I had a rattling good time and hated like the devil to quit; and you'll be the same way—I know you will. I'll go a step further with your case—as also mine—and

assert that the man who doesn't know fear is an utter stranger to the extreme delights of courage—for courage is a delight to the very soul after it takes possession. The trouble is, you've been thinking too much; you've been picturing foreign things in a foreign land, and your vision is distorted. Go to it, lad, and you'll be the same game rooster your daddy was before you!"

The Colonel finished with a burst of enthusiasm that was genuine until he saw the face of his staring listener. Then his jaws set and the appearance of age again crept slowly back. He turned away and began drumming on the table with his pencil.

"I suppose it can't be helped," he said, tremulously, after a death-like silence wherein the breathing of each was distinctly audible. "I suppose it's in one's make-up," he continued, as though pleading with an invisible accuser who was sitting there in judgment upon the son of his old friend. "It's probably like an ear for music, an eye for color, an aptitude for this or that pursuit in life—just stuck in, you know, without apparent cause; and so with the

stuff that makes soldiers." Then, turning in a sudden fury, he thundered: "But the hell of it is, that every born male baby should be then and there a born soldier, else nature has blundered in making it a male!—for a boy-child that comes into the world without that divine element which later would make it joyfully die for its country, ought to be a girl-child! I'm not sure that it ought to be anything at all, judging from the nobility our girls, our women, have always shown when their country bleeds! There's Marian Strong, possessed with the courage of a lion—yes, sir, a lion! I don't understand you; I don't understand anything—I'm damned if I do!—not anything at all!"

Again, except for the drumming pencil, the same sickening stillness filled the room. When Mr. Strong was heard outside talking to a member of his staff, the old soldier and the young slacker looked at each other quickly, almost guiltily, as if they had nearly been surprised in a crime. To their relief he turned and descended the stairs, but the Colonel tilted his chair until he could see the courthouse clock, saying drily:

"He'll be back in a few minutes. The draft registration is tomorrow. What are we going to do?"

Jeb felt as though his body were a sponge that had absorbed all the sickening heaviness extant throughout the world. There was a strong tugging within that demanded of him to cry aloud his intention to enlist, but another personality whimpered desperately, "I can't—I can't!" His own face now was drawn as the Colonel's had been; his eyes seemed filmy, and when he spoke his voice was lifeless.

"I know it is," he said.

It did not escape the Colonel that Jeb had replied directly to the thing which most concerned him. The draft was his evil fetish; second in importance came the question of what he should do, or whether Mr. Strong might return and be a witness to his disgrace—yet the Colonel even now was unwilling to call it this. Applied to any one else—yes! Treating with any one else he would doubtless have ordered him from the office. But this was the son of his old friend; the boy he had watched with pride, lo! these twenty-six years. One cannot in the

batting of an eye shake off an affection so deeply grounded!

"Well, sir, I know it, too," he suddenly exclaimed. "I ask you what we are going to do!"

"I—I wish I knew," Jeb answered desperately. "I—I want to do something——"

"You've *got* to do something," the interruption came with uncompromising sternness.

The door opened and Mr. Strong entered.

"Hullo," he cried, with a brevity characteristic of him when hurried. "Would have been here sooner, but that plagued unit had to be got fixed."

"What unit are you talking about, Amos?" the Colonel asked, glad and sorry for the interruption.

The editor seated himself and began to run a thin steel paper knife through one after another of several unopened letters.

"Barrow's," he answered, without turning around. "Barrow's hospital unit—leaves some time tonight; and Wade, the man listed to go from here, dropped a packing box on his foot. Barrow 'phoned me last night, and I've been looking for a suitable man all morning."

Nearly everyone in Hillsdale had heard that the great Barrow was heading a hospital unit, and the editor's nearest friends knew that he had been honored with permission to select one man from his own town. Now this man had come to grief! The Colonel looked across at Jeb. He saw at once a miraculous opportunity, and whispered:

"Helping about a hospital is a fine work, Jeb. Of course, it isn't like being with the Colors, but it means service—a very noble service!"

Jeb's mind had sprung farther ahead than the nobility of service. It saw a place of comparative safety, far from the range of shells; there would be no charging over parapets, no bullets would come ploughing through his stomach, no shrapnel would tear shreds from his face! He thought much of that face. He could actually be in France and come home a hero! Besides all these considerations, he would escape the draft!

The Colonel, watching closely, read each argument, each emotion. For a moment his own fearless, honest eyes drew to shiny points and his lips, had he not controlled them, would have

curled in disgust. But he could not quite forget that Jeb was the son of his old friend; aye, and his own friend. As there had been two personalities in Jeb, tugging for and against enlistment, so were there two beings in the Colonel's soul condemning and pleading for this weakling Hercules. He now turned anxiously to the editor, asking:

"You haven't found anyone, have you, Amos?"

"Eh? No, Roger, I haven't. Our boys, who are not already pledged to the Colors, prefer taking their turn with the draft."

"Then wire Barrow quickly that Jeb takes Wade's place!"

Mr. Strong swung about in his chair.

"Jeb? Does Jeb want *that* branch of service?"

"He's crazy for it, Amos! He wants anything that'll get him to France as speedily as possible."

The Colonel tried manfully, for the love of old associations, to look without flinching into the eyes of Amos Strong. He felt that Jeb should have told this lie—not, perhaps, an out

and out lie, for Jeb did truly want any service wherein he would escape the draft and gun-fire; but it was a lie, nevertheless, and the Colonel's cheeks burned hotly.

"Well, I'm——!" Mr. Strong did not say it —not that he wouldn't have! He turned, wrote a hurried direction and rang for his stenographer; then, as she retired, he wheeled back again with a cordial smile.

"You've greatly surprised me, Jeb—that is, I'm delighted with your resolution. I've a blank somewhere," he now began fumbling over the littered desk, "and we'll make it out at once; just a form, you know—all units have 'em in one style or another! Now: Name? —— Residence? —— Age? ——"

It was soon done and passed over for Jeb's signature which was attached with a firm, confident hand. Mr. Strong wrote awhile further, and looked up, saying:

"It may be slightly irregular, but the time is so short we can't help ourselves; so I've vouched for your physical condition. I've also waived indemnity in case you're killed, since, of course,

thus far in life you've contributed nothing to the support of your aunts."

This mention of being killed, put down in regular form, drove the color from Jeb's cheeks; but it seemed absurd to him and the next moment he laughed, saying:

"I don't suppose there's one chance in a thousand of that, way back in a hospital!"

The desk telephone rang and Mr. Strong took up the receiver, thus checking his reply.

"Yes, Barrow, I called you. I've a man for Wade's place. Still room? Good! Jeb Tumpson—known him all his life! J-E-B, yes, Jeb. Not time to mail it?—wait!" He reached for the application and began to read it slowly, sometimes repeating so the listener could take it correctly down. "When shall he report, Barrow? Good! He'll be uniformed there? Splendid! Don't forget, if you should see my daughter! Well, goodbye and good luck, Barrow; yours is a noble work, and God husband you!"

"Amen," the Colonel whispered.

Mr. Strong, hanging up the receiver, swung about enthusiastically.

"Jeb," he cried, "hustle! Barrow says bring only a suitcase and toilet articles; report to his hospital as soon as your train lands you, and be fitted out. I'll mail this original application to the proper place with a notation that you've left. You'll take the fast express this afternoon, reach him about nine-thirty, and sail some time after midnight. That's moving some!" he slapped his thigh. "Now hurry home and tell the little aunts. Roger and I will have money at the train for you. Oh, by the way," he arose and followed Jeb who was about to pass out, "I wouldn't let on about dangers, understand? Just pretend there aren't any; for if those dear ladies knew you were going into a branch of service where the death toll is higher than any place else in the army, they'd be ill with worrying."

Jeb leaned against the door-jamb and opened his lips wide for breath. His throat felt parched, his heart was beating like the roll-call on a drum. But Mr. Strong, moved greatly by the moment, laid a hand on his shoulder, adding:

"I haven't said as much as I want; I'm not

going to, either. You know I want to be proud of you, and I'll be watching for news with an interest akin to that which I feel for Marian. You're going away to play a mighty big game, boy, wherein Humanity is trumps and Patriotism, Righteousness and Service are the other three aces. Yet even if you hold all these, you may still lose unless you possess one more magic card: Self-respect. We all owe to our soul a certain measure of self-respect, Jeb. It is a gentleman's personal debt of honor to himself, demanding payment before every other obligation, and is satisfied only when we face each of life's crises with steel-tipped, crystal courage. Think of this often; carry it with you everywhere; it is the last and best thing I can give you. Now hustle!" he gave him an affectionate push. "We'll be at the depot waiting."

Jeb went down the stairs in a storm of mental hysteria. His physical senses seemed to be numb, but the brain more than made up for this. It was writhing in an agony of fear, a chaos of racing tortures; yet in their midst one thing stood aloof with the firmness of rock.

This was the belief—unassailable, absolute—that he could not by any human means turn from the direction his life was pointing. He felt this profoundly. His mind kicked and held back against it, but a great something was calmly impelling him on. He hated this inexorable force; he cursed it; for he did not realize that it was his own soul!

The editor had followed him out, having duties elsewhere in the building, so the Colonel sat alone listening to their retreating steps. His fine head was erect, his hands were clasped and his arms thrust out before him on the table. Jeb's confession was burning into his brain as he reviewed every chapter of the boy's behavior since early April. Each of Jeb's procrastinations and evasions now stood out clearly, connoting but one thing, predicated on but one thing! Slowly the old gentleman's mustache began to move in a curious way; by degrees his face became convulsed; then, letting his head fall between the outstretched arms, he yielded to a great sob:

"My God—a coward!"

CHAPTER VII

Some time before daylight Jeb fell asleep. In the work and hustle of getting aboard and stowing supplies for his unit, of dodging a company of Canadians looking to their own embarkation, and of steering his course through half an army of sweating stevedores who were loading vast quantities of freight for the Allied army, he had not thought of himself. But he had felt the elation which comes to all who are cohesively striving for a single purpose that lies beyond dangerous, and as yet unsurmountable, ground. He had responded to the *camaraderie* of these Canadian chaps, and it had been good. Now he slept.

The steamer that took his unit to France, and these few furloughed boys from Canada back to their regiment, was not large as steamers go, but it looked monstrous to Jeb. Had he been familiar with trans-Atlantic travel he would

have missed the library, main saloon, smoking and writing-rooms, as these spaces which formerly belonged to the pleasure traveler were now converted into bunks. Bunks were everywhere—empty bunks for the most part on this trip, but ready for the great movement later on. Perhaps the next time over she might bring the American boys!

When these lads from Canada, the doctors and the nurses (and the stretcher bearers, of which Jeb was one, although he had not yet discovered it) realized their transport was an old reconverted German tub, they would have cheered an irony so delightful had not orders been issued for complete silence. No one must know that this ship, secretly restored from the ravages of her former crew, entertained the slightest idea of sailing; not one of the swarm of spies in German pay, infesting New York and its environs, must suspect this midnight-to-dawn embarkation! So, while Jeb slept, tugs quietly warped her out, towed her in ghost-like fashion toward the Bay and turned her free. By daylight she was over the horizon.

And no one suspected that before daylight

one of the sweating stevedores, washed and smartly dressed, left his back-hall room in a Hoboken boarding house, crossed to New York and entered a telephone booth in a large hotel; thereupon calling an uptown number and telling a keen-eyed man who listened gratefully that his wife was out of danger and the doctor had left at two o'clock. Later that morning one of the commercial messages which loaded the telegraph wires sped to a merchant in Buenos Ayres asking quotations on 8,000 feet of 2-A grade mahogany veneer; and, half an hour later, the Swedish Legation there was telling Berlin that, upon this date, at 2 A. M., a steamer of 8,000 tons burden had cleared New York, destination France.

When the bugles sounded reveille Jeb fell out with the others. This taste of the military was decidedly acceptable to him. He regretted that his unit did not fall in for mess, as the Canadian veterans, for instance. He regretted keenly his ignorance of army matters, the manual, even, and the habit that came with constant discipline of keeping oneself smart, straight, clear-eyed and ever courteous—as a good sol-

dier is. There were several pretty nurses aboard—several who were not!—and for once his classic features found worthy rivals in the less handsome, though more perfectly conditioned, regulars.

Jeb had not realized as yet that he was stepping into an age where Service counts above all other human assets; where the millionaire who sits smugly in his club is contemptible beside the twenty-five dollar a week man who puts his shoulder to the yoke. He had not seen this as yet, nor could he have believed that henceforth, as never before, the real men and real women of the world would be graded by the stamp of *sterling service,* as distinguished from, and higher than, sterling dollars. This great lesson he had yet to learn, as millions are learning and will continue to learn.

There sometimes comes in the life of men an affinity for other men; when two from afar will be drawn together as old acquaintances. This is more usual when the sexes are crossed—at least, poets would have it so—but in all reaches of human habitation there are moments when a man will see another in a crowd and say to

himself, "I'd like to meet that chap!" Thus it was with Jeb and Sergeant Tim Doreen, one-time citizen of Galway (the old sod), later American citizen, still later discharged with honor from a Canadian regiment because of a grievous wound. But wounds meant less to Tim than fighting and now, within six weeks, he was on his way back. "Not as I wouldn't love to go wid me Stars an' Stripes, lad," he carefully explained, "—for 'twould do me 'art good to slug the heathen Boche from under its majistic folds—but ye'll be some time gittin' ready over here, whilst the b'ys av me old rigiment is standin' at attintion waitin' fer me this minute!"

He and Jeb possessed not one thing in common, yet each was endowed with something the other would have given his all to own. Jeb's face, for instance, was like a cameo, high-bred, delicate and intellectual; Tim's was scarred by shrapnel—although it had never been much of a face to start with! He had always wanted to be handsome, for he loved beauty extravagantly, be it in man or woman. Jeb, moreover, was tall, splendidly built, graceful; his hands were

smooth, his fingers well groomed, he carried himself with the air of a gentleman. Tim was short, perhaps just within the army requirement; he was built like a pine knot, was smartly soldierly but lacked every other grace; his hands were what hands should be that had not shirked in the trenches. He could not have passed for a gentleman—or for what is the usually accepted term for that individual—with all the arts of Poole and the rest of Piccadilly thrown in; and Tim's highest ambition would have been to walk some evening into the Ritz-Carlton, Sheppards, Continental, or Plaza, "wid clothes enough an' manners enough to make them as eats there break their sweet necks wid lookin', an' strain their soft eyes wid admirin' av me!"

Jeb could have done it, for he drew just such looks in places given over to social frivolities; so Tim liked Jeb, because Tim was generous and knew only a manly man's psychology. Little did he dream which of the two would attract the smiles of admiration, the tears of adulation, in the great field of human service! Just one thing he did possess, however, which Jeb would have given his world for, and that was courage. If

ever man bore the mark of courage, 'twas Tim Doreen! Perhaps the widest breach between them might have been thus summed up: Jeb was well aware that Jeb was handsome; Tim had never given a thought to the fact that Tim was in the highest sense courageous.

The duties of a sergeant are not all hammocks and cigarettes. He occupies an anomalous position of go-between for his captain and the men; he must swear here, praise there, appear to be hurt at other times. He must never miss anything, from a grumble beneath the breath to a blistered heel or a bad tooth. He must lay alongside the men, in a figurative sense, and get to know their souls; and get them to love him or to hate him—but never to think of him with indifference. If his captain is wise, he will listen to him patiently and follow his advice; for a good sergeant maketh a happy company, just as truly as a good housewife maketh a contented home.

There were few duties aboard ship. The Canadians were already veterans, and their new captain who was taking them back allowed more loafing than usual. He believed in a generous

breathing space before the sterner days to come —providing they kept themselves fit! Neither did Barrow care much how his unit employed its time, if all hands attended his lectures and first aid demonstrations; and so it came about that Tim and Jeb sat many hours together. It also followed that Tim saw in his new friend elements which puzzled him, for now, the sixth day out, he turned, saying quietly:

"Lad, ye've been talkin' a lot about this Medical Corps job av yours, an' the risk ye're takin'; an' whin ye're not talkin', ye're wonderin' how soon we'll be blowed up be a submarine! W'ot ails ye now? W'ot's bitin' ye?"

The irresistible caress of the Celtic tongue was in Tim's question, and Jeb, hesitating but a moment, impulsively leaned toward him.

"Tim," he said, "I don't want you to think less of me, but the idea of being sunk out here in mid ocean, or being shot up in a battle, scares me stiff. I guess I'm a—a——"

"Don't say it," the other checked him. "Don't be callin' yeself w'ot ye'd be knockin' the head off anither mon for sayin! I've suspected ye had a strong leanin' thot way, Jeb, but

hadn't thought no less av ye, as I've seen manny a lad change from bad to good in the jumpin' av a cartridge clip."

"But the worst of it is, Tim, that I came away to escape the draft; and now I see the draft was a cinch to what I've got into."

"It *is* not!" Tim vigorously replied. "I'd sooner have yer job twinty times! To begin wid, ye only had wan chanct in eight to be taken in the draft, but wid the doctors ye're *shure* to see scrappin'! Thot's the way to look at it, lad!"

"Oh, I know!—but I can't," Jeb muttered, despairingly. "Since Barrow told me I had to lug a stretcher I haven't eaten a meal a day, Tim. It isn't sea-sickness, either, for the ocean's like a mill pond; it's just knowing the Medical mortality is heavier than any branch of the service—heavier'n air fighting, even!"

"Thot's right," Tim said thoughtfully. "Medical comes first—fifty-fifty, mind ye; thin the infantry, an' thin the air—or maybe 'tis the artillery; I forget now. But, anyway, thot's w'ot makes it worth a domn, can't ye see, lad? I own thot it don't strike me funny-bone,

though. Whin I stand up for to be shot at, I want to do some shootin' meself; I don't want to have me hands glued to no stretcher, an' me heart bleedin' for the poor divil on it, an' let a lot of 'arf-fed outcasts plug me lights out! No, sor! Whin anny lunatic av a Hun pulls his trigger at Tim Doreen it arouses me timper, an' I'd be apt to drop me load an' go back an' take a swat at 'im; thin, like as not, the doctors 'd have me court-martialled!"

"If you hadn't got blown up first," Jeb bitterly replied.

"Now, don't ye go thinkin' 'bout bein' blowed up! 'Tis the worst kind av weed a soldier can smoke!—an' I'm sayin' 'tis been the trouble wid ye, Jeb; ye think too much! Transfer thim thoughts to how quick ye're goin' to blow up the inimies av yer country; thin yell wanst or twict like the ould divil hisself, an' ye'll be itchin' for a scrap so's ye can't sleep! Quit thinkin' thot rot 'bout bein' kilt—which ye can't control in anny case; an' begin thinkin' how ye'll kill a Hun—which ye *can* control! Thot's the creed, as good soldiers sees it!"

"But hell, Tim," he said, with something like

a whine, "I can't possibly shut out the dangers! They loom up like mountains."

"Hell yer *own* self," the sergeant turned on him. "Dangers as looks mountain high ain't no more'n a hill o' beans whin ye git ye're belly on 'em! W'y, look!—me ould faythe r, wanst, waked me in the night sayin' as a gang o' burglars was downstairs lootin' the family silver. Well, lad, bein' but half awake I believed 'im, an' the goose flesh growed out on me ar-rms so that—'tis the truth I'm tellin' ye—I plucked enough for a parlor duster! But whin I got downstairs investigatin', the gang was no more'n a loose shutter flappin' in the wind. The burglars was just a noise—d'ye git me? No danger, but a noise—an' w'ot's a noise? Ye see, Jeb, 'twas the wrong kind of thinkin'; an' the wrong kind of thinkin' breeds fear, an' fear shrinks up a man whilst it makes the inimy grow six inches. Put them six inches on yeself, say I, an' let the Boche shrink—which he'll do, too, whin he sees ye've the bigger courage!"

It did not occur to Jeb that this man was doing his very utmost to inspire one spark of the lacking courage; he did not realize that

Tim was thoughtfully picking his words, as carefully as though he were telling stories to a little child. Tim would not have been the crack sergeant that he was had Jeb suspected this!

"I can see them shrinking now," Jeb said, with something like a sneer at Tim's assurance. "Why, everybody says they're the finest fighters on earth!"

"Thin iverybody lies, an' 'tis Tim Doreen as says it! There ye go again wid a lot of domn fool thinkin' of w'ot ye got no cause to think. Wasn't I just after tellin' ye there ain't no worse dry-rot for a soldier? The Boche can put up as good a scrap as most, lad, whin they're bunched in a crowd, but take 'em mon for mon an' they ain't no fighters a-tall, a-tall. I ain't denyin' their officers is hep to the game —but thot's just w'ot proves me p'int: for do ye s'pose their fat-headed gineral staff'd be silly enough to march ar-rmy after ar-rmy jam up aginst our strong positions, bunched like a herd o' sheep, if they didn't know the men was too spineless to go into the fray like us, or the British, or the Frinch—which is to say, in open order an' like hell?"

"I don't see how that'll get us anywhere," Jeb remarked.

" 'Twill get us *iverywhere,*" Tim replied emphatically. "Didn't it get us as far as we've got, whin we were at our wur-rst, an' thim at their best? An' they was shure a rattlin' ar-rmy thot first year, make no mistake on thot, lad! There was fine steel in 'em, mind ye: the 2nd Bavarian Corps, now, which did me heart good to fight wid!—cruel, unprincipled outcasts, to be shure, an' wid no mercy nor respect for women—still, they was good fighters! But of late the b'ys tells me their whole ar-rmy's been so watered down wid inferior stuff thot ye'd not know it for the same; an' lest they're touchin' elbows an' absorbin' courage w'ot comes from bein' clost, they ain't w'ot ye'd call reliable, anny more. They can't stand the gaff as they wanst could! W'y, I was in at the takin' av wan av their artillery positions on the Somme, lad, an' may I be shot for a spy if we didn't find gunners chained to the wheels! Ye don't need no searchlight to find the answer av thot, do ye now? Their fightin' *machine* is good, mind ye; but it ain't no more nor less'n

a red sausage machine whin iverythin's considered! But as for the individual fightin' mon, w'y, he don't grow over there, a-tall, a-tall!"

"That's all very well, Tim, but they kill a lot of our fellows, just the same!"

"Shure, ivery now an' thin wan av the b'ys is sent west; but ye wouldn't have a war all wan-sided, would ye? 'Twould be no war if ye did."

"It's all so horrible," Jeb shuddered. The mention of being "sent west" did not appeal to him since he had learned that it was the Tommy's way of saying that a man had been killed.

"Now, thot's where ye're wrong, lad," Tim straightened up to reach in his breeches pockets for "the makings," but his hand came out empty and he continued: "There's plenty av fun goin' on, an' laughs, too. I mind me wan day whin the '75's was barkin' their throats out an' bein' answered by God knows w'ot mighty ingines av war. We'd been brought up clost an' was lookin' for a rush anny minute, so the men was jokin' for the most part—thot or cussin'; 'tis all the same whin a rigiment feels

good! I was sint along to help the bombers adjust detonators an' straighten out pins, whin I come on a little cockney lad—timid like yeself, Jeb—holdin' a puddin' an' not knowin' w'ot to do wid it; so I says to 'im:

" 'Whin they git clost, now, pull out thot pin, count four, an' let her fly!'

" ' 'Ow let 'er fly?' he asks.

" 'W'y, chuck 'er, ye blighter!' says I.

" 'But 'ow farst must Hi count four?' he asks agin, lookin' worrit; 's'pose she goes hoff in me 'and?' he says.

" 'Well,' says I, 'if she goes hoff in ye 'and, sonny, ye may stop countin'.'

"An', Jeb," the sergeant added. "he laughed so 'twas all he could do to keep from droppin' it; but he got the hang, so help me, an' did a man's work thot day!"

"Oh, I couldn't do anything like that," Jeb cried despairingly. "I just couldn't! The whole idea is horrible! And look at their submarines, all around us everywhere!"

"Well, *look* at 'em! Where the divil d'ye see 'em! Has anny wan av 'em been comin' aboard for a nip av grog? There ye go thinkin'

wrong again, Jeb; ye make me lose me timper! Haven't we been sailin' right along in a sea as smooth as a lass's cheek, now comin' sivin days? W'y, me b'y, even this ould tub's too fast for 'em!" Tim yawned and rolled over on the deck, where they had been sitting with their backs against a partition wall that, in former days of German ownership, had inclosed the "gesellschafthalle." He searched again through his pockets, and yawned once more, saying: "Shure, an' 'tis a long time gittin' back wid the b'ys! But don't ye worry over w'ot's ahead—wait till it comes clost enough for ye to grab it. Most ivery trouble, lad, dies 'asy whin ye git yer teeth in good, an' shake it wanst or twict! Give me a bit av the makin's, Jeb; I left me own below!"

Jeb passed over his pouch and papers, then watched the sergeant roll a cigarette, light it, and give the match an outward flip. Taking a few deep inhalations he eyed Jeb back, and said thoughtfully:

"Lad, I don't want ye to take this wrong, but I've a mind to be askin' if ye have less courage than a gir-rl—a *lady* gir-rl, w'ot's been

raised in silver an' gold an' soft pilleys! I want ye to keep thot in mind whilst I tell ye a story; 'tis a story av me own wound, whin I got me 'packet' for Blighty—an' av a nurse w'ot had jist come out from the States, an' av a Frinch doctor w'ot's the king av all men, so help me! 'Twas 'im as brought me in off No Man's Land, where I was bleedin' me life away! He come right out through a rain av fire thot would have curled yer hair into little kinks av wire—for his stretcher bearers had been sore shot up thot day, an' he was doin' ivery kind av wur-rk at wanst. But, to git along: Whin I opened me eyes in the dressin' station dug-out I scarce knowed if I was alive or dead—so weak did I feel. He was standin' near, shakin' his head at a purty nurse, an' sayin': 'We got to lose 'im, for he's lost too much blood! If we had anny to transfuse,' he says, 'we'd pull 'im through, but thot's impossible,' he says, 'for me b'ys have bled too much a-ready,' he says."

Tim took another inhalation, and slowly continued:

"I was too weak to say me prayers—not thot I wasn't in need av thim! The nurse was look-

in' up at 'im wid big, wonderin' eyes, an' her breast was heavin'. 'Will thot save 'im?' she asks. ' 'Tis the only thing,' he answers, sorrowful. 'Thin save 'im,' she says, rollin' up her sleeve; 'here's the blood—save 'im, quick!'

"Well, Jeb," Tim sighed, "I never see sich a look as come into thot doctor's face. He stared at her, thin shouted so's ye could a-heerd 'im a mile: 'I won't do it!' But still she stands her ground, an' says in a flash: 'Ye will, if ye do yer dooty!' 'But I need ye', he cries again; 'I can't spare ye!' But she gives it to 'im strong, lad, an' says: 'A fightin' man is worth more'n a nurse jist now! Hurry, Doctor Bonsecours!'—for thot's his name, Jeb. 'But I need ye anither way, me darlin',' he pleads wid her—an' I hope to be shot for a spy if iver I see a holier look in a mon's face! She weakened a bit, an' her cheeks got r-rosy red, but she says up to him, brave as iver: 'Save this mon first, for all av France needs him!' Mind ye, lad, her sayin' thot all av France needed a beggar like me!—but 'twas because he hisself was Frinch, no doubt!"

Tim wiped his sleeve across his eyes. He

made no pretense at hiding the tears that sprang to them, for they were tokens of a deep and lasting gratitude, and he was not ashamed.

"An' so they did it, right there, lad, for a little runt av an Irishman; an' the last thing I heerd her sayin', as she breathed in thot stuff —I can't for the life av me remember its name —was: 'Plase be shure to take enough, Doctor!' "

Tim did not mention how he had joined what little voice he possessed with that of Bonsecours, pleading with her to make no such sacrifice; and then, finding this useless, threatening to kill the great surgeon if he so much as scratched her arm.

"Thot's the way people fight an' live out there, lad. Mind ye, the blessed nurse hadn't known 'im more'n a week—maybe less; but it don't take long for men or women to see the kind av stuff as is in each ither, whin they're totterin' on the edge av No Man's Land! Annyway, I don't know as she iver give 'im the answer he wanted; but w'ot's more to the p'int av me story is this; thot she's nothin' but a blessed gir-rl, from a little town back home, mind ye,

but I'd have ye know thot the gr-reat wur-rk Doctor Bonsecours has done is the talk av the Frinch ar-rmy—an' she's his right-hand liftenant. She's as tender as tears, lad, but as brave as a lion—an' in about the same job as yeself. She don't mind the shells a-tall, a-tall! D'ye git that, Jeb?"

"What town did she come from?" Jeb asked, his eyes growing thoughtful.

"Sure, an' I can't think av it!"

"Was it——" He stopped abruptly, as a strange and curious sensation seized him. It seemed as though the deck suddenly heaved upward—very much like the feeling he would have if, sitting in a hammock, someone sat down beside him. Immediately following this came a terrific explosion, numbing in its intensity, and a wall of maddened water leaped past the rail for a hundred feet into the air. In a twinkling Tim dragged him through the door, as a shower of débris came down upon the place where they had been sitting. The huge smoke funnel crashed to the deck, scattering soot in all directions, then balanced an instant, and plunged into the sea.

In the midst of this confusion, even before the funnel disappeared, Tim was bellowing a command. His captain, at his side, waited as the men poured up to them, then said drily:

"Belts on the nurses; see that everyone's on deck, and belt yourselves!"

Life belts were everywhere within easy reach and, as the men scattered, Tim stopped an instant to hand one of them to his captain, who smilingly took it but was later seen tying it on Dr. Barrow.

The sergeant then dashed below, hurrying toward the staterooms to be sure that everyone got up to deck. In his reckless determination to make Jeb see this duty through, he had not let go of his sleeve.

"Take the doors on thot side," he now yelled at him in a voice of thunder, "an' I'll take this! Smash 'em down where they're jammed, an' look clost iverywhere inside! Sometimes women faints!"

With this he released his hold; but Jeb, trying to go on, could not—he could only cross his arms against the panels and press his head there to shut out the terror. When Tim, kick-

ing in a door three staterooms away, saw this he made one spring back and landed his next kick on a spot that made Jeb flinch. This was followed by another, and still another, while a string of lurid oaths poured from his lips which burned like a lash of fire. Jeb sprang around, one fist drawn back to kill, his eyes glittering as points of iron; but the sergeant's eyes were as points of steel. The next moment Jeb had started on the work of rescue. Tim worked across from him—and smiled.

When Tim had become satisfied that no one remained below, they began their retreat. By now the ship was listing to a degree which made it necessary for them to walk with one foot on the panelled wall, and to jump the cross halls. The stairs upward they negotiated with one foot on the balusters. At the landing above a number of life belts, having slid along the floor, lay piled in confusion against the wall; and before stepping out on deck Tim tied one of these on Jeb, then safeguarded himself, saying briefly:

"Stay clost to me!"

They found moving more difficult now, as the

ship had not stopped listing. The deck leaned so precipitously that they had to grasp the hand-rail, and work themselves by this means slowly around to the upper side. Tim moved with the coolness of a veteran. Jeb scrambled with the energy of despair.

There were plenty of boats at this upper rail, but to let them over was a difficult problem, since they must scrape down the ship's hull and risk being capsized or smashed. Those at the lower rail were entirely out of commission—splintered by the torpedo.

Tim saluted the captain—the ship's captain, this time—and barked his report. He was ordered to boat No. 1. When he reached this position Jeb was close behind, terror still pictured on his face. In a fury the sergeant turned to him, crying:

"Look at the courage av thim nurses, ye —— —— ——! Can't ye try to be a man? 'Ere, give a hand!" Another string of profanity rolling from his tongue was as potent as the kick had been, for Jeb, still gasping, fell to work.

And then a cry went up! It came from the

breasts of those who waited with limitless courage, and those who worked feverishly to save. It was the heartrending, bloodcurdling cry of people doomed—for the ship had begun to settle! Through his megaphone the captain yelled:

"Jump! Jump! For the love of God, jump!"

CHAPTER VIII

Jeb felt himself seized by the shoulder and torn from the davit to which he held. Confusedly he heard Tim yelling: "Swim off as far as ye can, lad!" and the next instant he was plunging downward, striking the ship's side and sliding, bounding off, turning, striking again and sliding, till he splashed into the water.

When his head came up—providentially with its senses—the sergeant's command lingered and he set his face away, swimming with all his might. Once or twice he paused for breath, because it is hard work propelling a life belt through the water, but these rests were momentary; till, feeling himself safe from suction, he turned over on his back and floated. In this position he could see the ship, and was just in time to watch the last of its passengers leave the rail. These were Tim and a pretty

nurse who had been too frightened at the dizzy height to take the leap until, tearing free her hold, he had lifted her in his arms and skidded down the side.

There was no confusion now. The sea had never seemed more peaceful. Heads were bobbing merrily in the water, as though in for a pleasure swim; beyond them lay the steamer, abjectly motionless—looking like a monster which might have arisen from the deeps to bask upon the surface. Jeb was wondering if he should not yet swim back and try to climb aboard, when the great hulk swayed—gently at first, this way and that; then, as if tender hands were lowering it into a grave, it slowly began to sink.

At this point the prevailing quiet was shattered by a hell of sounds. Had a score of nearby thunder storms been raging and a hundred frame houses ruthlessly been crushed between two great forces, their combined noises might have been compared to those issuing from the stricken vessel as she took her plunge—until the closing waters choked them into a kind of gurgling silence, as though a bellowing giant

were being drowned instead of a thing of splintering wood and groaning steel.

Dazed as Jeb was, he saw a mountain-high wave of seething foam rise from the grave and roar toward him with the speed of unchecked horses. Tossing like jack-straws on its crest were bunks, in part or whole, chairs, planking, and débris of all descriptions. As it drew near he took a deep breath and crossed his arms to protect his face. The next second it was atop of him.

An eternity seemed to pass before he came up—an eternity during which he rolled over and over in a seething green wilderness. When, choked and coughing, he gained the surface he felt that it had been changed into another world. The former peace of waters scarcely disturbed by gentle waves whereon heads had bobbed in apparent merriment, the listed ship that had lain sleeping on the skyline, were gone; in their stead was a great waste of hissing bubbles which burst about his face and blinded him. The surface had become an ocean of hisses—as though the submarine, agent of that nation which generates hate, had by some wicked magic

changed the water with its hatred, too! And in the midst of this confusion a chorus of three hundred passionate voices wailed their anguish to a passive God; for, while these human beings had been whole before, there were now many whom the sweeping wreckage had torn—some with fractured bones, some disembowled, some mercifully dead! Never could Jeb have dreamed a transition so horrible!

Already scores of panic-stricken were climbing on an overturned boat, drifting off to the right. Another upturned boat floated at a greater distance, and Jeb saw the bobbing heads appear again, beginning to move as a flock of swimming ducks toward it. But many heads did not move at all, and he knew what their inertia meant. One of this kind floated close to him, and made him sick. He pushed it away, but it kept drifting back, seeming unwilling to leave him, till in desperation he untied the life belt tapes and let it sink. An hour earlier, had Jeb been told he could do this, he would have screamed denials.

Presently a voice hailed him cheerily, and he beheld Tim, still holding the little nurse, bal-

anced on a kind of box affair that floated almost flush with the water.

"Come over, Jeb," the sergeant called. "Shure, an' there's room for wan more, an' 'tis cold ye'll be, I'm thinkin' afore we turn in tonight!"

"He oughtn't to joke like that," Jeb thought, beginning now to shiver; for he had become tired, and swam the intervening distance painfully.

"Easy, lad," Tim leaned to give him a hand, "for if ye don't look smart 'tis off we go agin, an' 'twon't do the lass no good bein' colder'n she is! Did I hurt ye now, me darlin'?" he asked a moment later of the little nurse, who smiled back at him. Blood and water were trickling down her ashen face from a scalp wound; yet she was many times more fortunate than scores of other poor creatures near to them. There is an unparalleled ruthlessness in a sweeping wave of heavy débris, beneath which a human body can be ground to atoms.

Jeb had no more than safely got astride the box—a tippy affair it was—when they were startled by someone blaspheming in a way that

made their flesh creep. Even Tim blanched; for in the voice he recognized the timbre of insanity. He had seen this happen in the trenches, when men driven mad by concussion or gas or horrors ran amuck among their fellows. The one who now swam toward them was evidently a stoker—a powerful creature. His face was grimed with coal dirt, his eyes were red, and his blasphemies were interspersed with hilarity at the prospect of cutting their throats. When thirty yards off he stopped swimming, reached beneath the life belt and got out a knife—then, holding it conveniently between his teeth, came on.

Jeb would have left the box and made a dash for the open sea had not Tim checked him by a firm command; for, with the little nurse wounded in his arms, the sergeant had but one recourse and he was man enough to take it.

"Be smart now, Jeb," he said. "Reach thot broken oar, lad, lest it floats past ye! Now brace yeself, an' whin the poor divil gits clost, belt 'im wan on the head wid all yer might! Kill 'im the first crack!"

"Kill him!" Jeb screamed in horror. "Kill him! Man, I can't!"

"Ye fool, ye can an' ye will!" Tim's voice bit into him like a file. "D'ye want 'im up here slittin' the throats av us—an' this gir-rul to boot? He's looney, man! 'Tis 'im, or the three av us! Quick—str-rike!"

Jeb felt his muscles turn to steel under this commanding voice. The piece of oar rose high above his head and, as the crazed stoker was about to lay hand upon the box, came down with all his strength.

The little nurse clung tighter to the sergeant and buried her face in his tunic.

"Dear Christ!" she whispered, shivering.

The man floated slowly by, rising and falling easily with the waves. His face hung downward in the water, his arms were extended in the attitude of a benediction. After him trailed a narrow streak of red, growing wider though less bright as it mingled with the sea.

"I wonder if the poor divil still has thot knife in his teeth," was Tim's observation, spoken from the depth of sorrow.

Jeb held the broken oar out before him as a

thing unclean, then opened his fingers and let it fall.

Scarcely more than twenty minutes could have passed since the vessel sank, but she had been struck late in the afternoon and the sun now slanted perilously near the horizon. Tim and the little nurse looked at it thoughtfully, but neither spoke. Only a slight pressure of their arms suggested that each believed it would never rise for them—or, rising, would look upon a sea of floating dead. Jeb had not noticed the sun. His face was lowered close to the planking of their frail refuge. The ocean had again become a thing of peace and beauty—and silence. Those who were on upturned boats had realized the impotency of screaming, and merely clung with dogged tenacity; those who had been too much lacerated to reach these places of imperfect shelter, had yielded to the cradling waves and were now asleep. Thus the minutes dragged. Then the sergeant gave a cry of consternation.

"Well, w'ot d'ye know about thot! May I be shot for a spy, if 'tain't the submarine!"

Little more than a hundred yards away a

monster was rising from the sea. Jeb looked up just as the conning tower emerged with water rushing off it like small Niagaras. Then, on a line of its submerged length, the ocean seemed to heave, pressed upward by the long gray hull that now broke through. It arose majestically, sleek as a bathing seal, reflecting the westering sun like wet granite. Almost at once the man-hatch in the conning tower opened, two sailors bobbed out and drew respectfully aside as an officer climbed leisurely to deck. He stood awhile twisting his mustache, gazing at the overturned boats with their desperate crews; for the partially submerged box nearer by, and its three human atoms, he had not yet noticed.

At sight of him the sergeant's temper flared.

"Look!" he cried. "Look, Jeb!—look, me darlin'!—see for wanst in yer lives a murderin' sore dressed in the livery av a rotten master!" As the officer turned in their direction Tim shook his fist at him, this time becoming the incarnation of rage. "Turn yer ugly mug away!—turn it away, I tell ye, from a sight too blessed for yer dirty eyes to see!—ye cholera

germ!—ye fester!—ye—ye—— Oh, me darlin','' he wailed to the little nurse, ''if ye'd but go deaf a minute whilst I tell 'im what's in me 'art!'' And in disappointment he held his thumb to his nose, by this most desperate sign trying to express the insults his tongue could not utter.

Jeb was trembling.

''Don't make him mad, Tim,'' he implored. ''He might kill us!''

''The dirty coward can only kill wan thing, an' thot's me body, but me soul'll go on cussin' 'im till the ind av doom.'' He shook his fist again, becoming more derisive: ''Look at his head, now! If 'tain't the shape av a rotten pear may I be shot for a spy!—mind ye how it slopes up to a p'int, both fore-and-aft, and amidships; the fat-jowled swine!''

The man had been regarding them stolidly. He may not have understood Tim's insults, but the gestures were unmistakable. Without taking away his stare he spoke a brief command to one of the sailors who ducked below, reappearing with a rifle.

Tim grew at once thoughtful, but Jeb, cower-

ing lower, began to hurl abuses at him. He had warned him, he cried; and now see what was going to happen!

Without further ado the sailor took deliberate aim and fired; the little nurse flinched, shuddered, and relaxed. Tim looked down at her with widening, almost unbelieving, eyes; then raised his face to the sky and, like a wounded animal, emitted one long howl. All of the plucky sergeant's grief, fury, self-condemnation —aye, and love—were in that wail of agony.

The sailor was aiming for another shot when Jeb's ears were filled with a weird, screeching noise; a violent jolt of air almost knocked him from the box, and a geyser of spray shot up ten feet from the submarine's bow. Before even the deep boom of the distant gun that had fired this projectile reached him, another screeching followed, another jolt of air struck him in the face, and this time, with a mighty roar, the undersea boat split almost in two.

Had not the officer and two sailors been so intent upon a petty revenge they might have seen, coming at express speed between themselves and the sun, a British fast patrol; how-

ever, it is difficult at best to detect spots against so dazzling a light—and there is, besides, the working of an all-powerful justice to be reckoned with!

The two sailors, standing between their commander and the explosion, crumpled up as if they were air bags pricked with a knife; but the officer did not fall. He staggered once, nearly losing his balance, and then looked stupidly at the great hole into which roared a revenging sea. His U-boat was sinking fast; though by no agency from within. Those below would forever remain below; they had made their own grave, and their casket would be the steel monster which typified the steel-clad hand of another monster—their master!

But the officer did not think so loyally of his master when he found himself about to face a Higher King. The steel-clad hand had forsaken him; even the German God—the "made in Germany" one which German professors and German pastors were loud in proclaiming as distinct and more refined than the God who watches over England, France and America—had now forsaken him. He felt the same im-

pulse to howl that Tim had felt, although love and self-condemnation were not a part of it; only hatred. The water had reached his feet; with one more look around he sprang outward and began to swim.

"I've been prayin' for thot, me darlin'," Tim whispered. His arms relaxed from about the little dead nurse. With fingers of tenderness he untied the life belt tapes, then let her sink gently into the waves. "God bless ye, lass! 'Tis only today we met, but ye'll live wid Tim Doreen an' no ither till he's sent west to ye!" Leaning forward he watched her as she sank into the light green water, her hair streaming gracefully upward as though waving him goodbye, till the brightness of it was claimed by the darker green below. Then Tim became another man.

"Which way is thot——" he bellowed, but he saw the pear-shaped head before Jeb could answer. With one gesture of fury he stripped off his own life belt, and yelled: "Now, ye murderer av women, wan av us is due in hell, an' 'tain't Tim Doreen, ayther, ye tub av slop!"

He struck out powerfully, straight for the

man he had sworn to kill, but in changing once from the overhand to side stroke he saw Jeb, white as a sheet, swimming directly behind. Without pausing, he asked:

"W'ot the divil brings ye here?"

"I owe him something, too," Jeb panted. "I'm coming."

For an instant the sergeant forgot his oath, and a slow grin overspread his face.

"Well, w'ot d'ye know about thot!" he said. "God bless ye, lad; but ye can help best by settin' on the box. 'Tis me own fight; do as I tell ye, now!"

Jeb could not have described that fight, because he was too far off to see distinctly—and Tim never referred to it. But he saw the German, when Tim had come to within ten feet of him, turn and begin swimming frantically away. There was doubtless something in the sergeant's eyes that sapped the other's courage. Relentlessly Tim gained, each stroke bringing him a few inches nearer, till he seemed to crawl up on the officer's back. After that they might have been two splashing fish—till Tim began slowly to swim back.

"God, Tim," Jeb cried, holding out a hand. "I wish you'd let me come! I—I believe I might have done it!"

The sergeant drew himself on the tippy box, and panted:

"Ye'll have a chance, lad whin ye see ither dastardly things thim outcasts do! No man can keep from fightin', Jeb! Shure, an' the Boches make their own wur-rst inimies!"

He sat despondently, regaining his breath and blinking the water from his eyes, when something caught to a sleeve button on his tunic made him stare. It was a short piece of black-and-white striped ribbon—the Order of the Iron Cross—which the German had worn in a breast button-hole of his uniform.

"Well, w'ot d'ye know about thot," he mused.

Slowly he twisted off the button, and the ribbon with it, then leaned above the spot where the little nurse's hair had waved her last farewell, and let them sink.

" 'Tis me first dicoration, darlin'," he whispered; and it was not the ocean water now that blinded him.

Just as the red sun dipped that night the

patrol boat picked up the last piece of human wreckage, and dashed toward the coast of France.

CHAPTER IX

Barrow's unit had suffered sorely, but its gaps were filled from other sources and fresh supplies received from home. Close upon the middle of August it moved to take the field. This delay had not been without advantages, perhaps the chief of which was a fluency in French that many of his men were able to acquire. It had also given Jeb an opportunity to acquire an entirely new viewpoint regarding the purposes of this war, which had not penetrated to Hillsdale.

As the train now proceeded slowly, switching here and there to let other strings of cars pass toward the front with more important freight, Jeb felt that he was at last nearing the great adventure. His experience with the submarine left an indelible effect without producing anything like the result Tim would have desired. For Jeb had been involuntarily projected into

that crisis before being given time to think; he had gone with the stream, not buoyed by courage but spurred by despair. Once tossed into the hideous vortex, he simply had to get out—which was vastly different from deliberately going into it with eyes ahead, as now when he approached the battle front! Nevertheless, the torture he faced upon the floating box, although unknown to him, left an impress for the good.

As he sat uncomfortably drawn up on the seat of a third-class compartment he missed Tim, and wondered dully if the regiment, which that little son of Mars had said was waiting for him—at attention!—could now be in the thick of things. He pictured Tim chasing Germans with the same dogged nerve that he had chased and caught the murderer of the little nurse. As evening fell, battle scenes grew vivid in the twilit compartment, because he was thinking again! Whenever speeding trains passed, their approaching rumbles would make him start, and leave him sick in spirit; for each time he would at first mistake them for the growling of distant guns, and he dreaded the hour when these sounds would reach him. He despised the

thought of guns, despised the military trains, despised the war, the blood and maiming;—he despised himself. He needed Tim!

"Is there anything on your mind, old fellow?" one of the unit asked him kindly.

"Oh, no," he forced himself to laugh. "Have a cigarette, won't you?"

Early next morning, after an almost sleepless night, the unit disembarked at a village standing as a solitary outpost on the edge of a great unknown wilderness. Beyond this point the railroad, even civilization, had been paralyzed by the dragon that fed upon humanity. If Jeb expected the villagers to be out in force to greet Barrow's unit, he was disappointed; for, with the exception of a crippled man laboriously pushing a cart, a nun who with bowed head came from one doorway and hurried into another, and a bent old woman struggling to take down the night shutters from her shop window, the place might have been deserted. On the far side of his train, however, where he had not looked, a group of soldiers lounged about their wagons waiting to take these passengers of mercy forward; unshaven chaps they were, well

meriting the nickname of *poilus*—"the hairy ones."

Now that the train had stopped he could hear the far-off growling of guns; deep-voiced monsters which his imagination pictured straining on their leashes while snarling at each other across the space of miles—truly dogs of war! He drew farther back in the seat, dreading to get out; but the moment had come, the fellows and nurses were moving to the door, the great task was at hand! He tried, while standing, to simulate indifference, but his legs were weak and his teeth chattered, just a little, in spite of his effort to control himself. It seemed as if he were forever wanting to yawn, conscious of the heaviness upon his chest.

With Dr. Barrow and a lieutenant on the first creaking wagon, the others followed, but there was no road. A morass was there, that formerly had been a road—a ditch sloshy with mud which, in some places, made it necessary for all hands to climb down and put their shoulders to the wheels.

"It is trying, this traveling in limbers," the lieutenant smiled apologetically. "The inces-

sant hauling up of shells from our bases destroys the best of roads in a few days. But what would you?" he shrugged, smiling again. "If the ammunition dumps are constantly depleted, they must be fed!"

The far-off French artillery, in skillfully emplaced positions to right and left, seeming to enfilade on a point immediately ahead, was so vigorously directed that the German guns must have been dazed, since their counter-battery work sounded spasmodic and—so far as distance permitted Jeb to guess—never effective. Yet he was moving toward that tumult; as inexorably as death, he approached it. With eyes feeding upon this new world and ears startled by fierce rumblings, he felt as though he were living in a nightmare; and when the next minute threatened to snap his reason or strangle his frantically pounding heart, he turned to the driver, asking—but fearful of the answer:

"Who's winning this battle?"

It was spoken only in Hillsdale French, aided by a two months stop in Paris; but his *poilu* companion smiled brightly and replied in the average Paris English:

"Oh, Monsieur, there is now for three days what you call *moment decalme.* Tomorrow, if no rain, *oui!*—perhaps a ver' fine battle!"

Then this was a lull!—this cannonading, that to Jeb seemed reaching from skyline to skyline, was only a lull! Merciful God, he cried in his soul, what might a battle be like!

By midday, after hours of frightful tugging, they were halfway on their journey, being well out on what two weeks ago was the battle field, but now presenting a picture of broadcast desolation. Shell craters, caused by heavier projectiles burrowing and bursting, pockmarked the ground like a telescopic photograph of the moon. Fields, so lately rich with waving grain, were blasted into subsidences and cavities, bisected by crumbled trenches before which the wreckage of barbed-wire entanglements—a fortnight since forming barriers so impregnable as to resemble from a distance walls of red rust—lay snarled and tied into a million knots by the ruthless lyddite fingers.

It was a pastoral landscape distorted by the paralysis of suffering and death, and Jeb realized that not for many years would these tor-

tured fields regain their tranquillity. Where were rises, now lay depressions; the loamy top soil was blown into dust and scattered to the winds, while sterile clay and pebbly strata had been boiled up from below to take its place. Mixed with this mass of unprofitable earth, strewn over its surface and buried for a depth of thirty feet, were thousands of tons of other wire, iron stakes, and wire stanchions; cartridge cases, rifles, and gas gongs; sand bags, iron scraps, and forge tools; steel helmets, spades, and telephones; pieces of uniforms, water pipes, pick axes, gas masks, binoculars, trench periscopes, blankets, surgical dressings, boots, aye, and human bones—all, all things which the plow shares of coming generations would be turning up to remind man (should man ever forget) that Humanity had once been outraged by a people who, although made in the imitation of Christ, preferred to assume the habits of beasts.

"How, in the name of God," Jeb cried, "could any army stand before such a blasting as must have been here!"

"Our army did, Monsieur," the driver said

quietly. "It not only stood, but drove the Boche far back."

"Well, I take off my hat to your army!"

"The world does, also, Monsieur," his companion replied; although it was modestly spoken, without a hint of boastfulness. "We do not fight like the Boche, Monsieur," he added simply. "Their methods are more like a mob with a bad conscience; they fight more with a dread of being defeated than with the honesty of soldiers who have an honest cause."

He then explained to Jeb that these fields, after all, represented merely the face to face struggle of man and man, and were therefore less sickening than the devastation they would see farther on, which stood as a monument to the enemy's vilest cupidity. This became apparent when they began to cross that stretch of country gloatingly described by German newspapers as "the empire of death"—meaning a territory seven or eight miles in width, extending over the entire front, which by order of "the High German Command" was converted absolutely into waste. Forced by the Allies to retreat, this "High German Command" con-

ceived that, by leaving a barrier of desolation and cruelty so terrible, no army would be hardy enough, or have heart enough, to advance across it. Their system was complete, as the results now showed—although their calculations had gone wrong.

"First, Monsieur," he said, "they began by robbing the American Relief Committee's supplies, immediately following their solemn pledge to permit this food to succor the starving peasantry; therefore those pitiable folk, already tragic human wrecks, continued to starve. Next they killed these peasants' cows to fill their own precious bellies, and then the little babies began, by slow starvation, to die. But the men, women, and boys old enough to till the soil, or work in German factories, were fed and sent away; the girls pretty enough to wait upon German officers —you know what that means, Monsieur—were dressed in stolen finery and, weeping, driven to their new positions—six hundred of them taken from within the space that you are looking on now, although we have learned that many succeeded in killing themselves. Only the helpless aged and the babes escaped these brutalities; for

they, being useless, were left to the mercy of the vultures, unless salvaged by our army. Right on this ground we saved many such, Monsieur; *Mon Dieu!* but how our army did weep over them!"

Jeb had already seen enough to bring this recital well within the focus of truth, and as the wagons wound slowly forward he further saw to what depth of hatred and cold malice the mind of that "High Command" descended. Burned villages and hamlets might have been expected, as conflagrations spring from bursting shells, yet even his inexperienced eye detected a very sharp distinction between ruins wrought by military operations and the vandalism caused by unbridled, bestial passions. For nowhere upon this barren outlook had a house been left standing—all was a mass of tumbled brick and stone and clay and twisted timbers, licked by flames or crumbled by explosions scientifically placed by German engineers; nay, nor was there even a barn, nor an agricultural implement with which some palsied peasant woman might in time reclaim her land. Iron of plows, of harrows, of cultivators, lay in piles

amidst the ashes of their frames; spokes of wagon and cart wheels had been hacked to splinters, and harness cut into useless bits. Wells had been fouled by chucking in their own dead, or stable refuse. In the orchards every tree stood girdled, the immature fruit wrinkled amidst withered leaves. Never again, unless French nurserymen sped here hastily to bridge from bark to bark, or graft onto the old stumps, —as they had elsewhere attempted with varying promise—would these slopes of arboriculture put forth buds; neither would the poplars, planes, mulberries, willows—all had been granted citizenship to this newly created German Empire, "the empire of death."

"Where are those whom you did not salvage —I mean the girls? Are they still in the German lines?" Jeb asked.

"Not if they have found a way to die," his comrade answered in a whisper. "The Belshazzar feast of those Prussian swine, Monsieur, is the Calvary of every maid who does not find a swifter way to God—but the debauched officers know that, and keep them closely guarded. Oh," he cried, "our hearts

give thanks that your country is coming to help us avenge these things! All along we have said that if the American spirit of decency and fairness—so well known and loved by us—could but see even the little which you have seen, your armies would be pouring to our aid!—just as your wonderful nurses have come!"

Jeb felt a rush of self-righteous anger that for the moment transcended his horror of going forward. While in Paris he had read official translations from the German press; now with his own eyes he was looking upon the things gloatingly described in the *Berliner Tageblatt* * when it told the people of Berlin: "The enemy's mouth must stay dry, his eyes turn in vain to the wells—they are buried in rubble. No four walls for him to settle down into; all levelled and burnt out, the villages turned into dumps of rubbish, churches and church towers laid out in ruins. Smouldering fires and smoke and stench; a rumble spreading from village to village—the mine charges still doing their final work, which leaves nothing more to do."

* *Berliner Tageblatt.* March 26, 1917.

It was a cry of false triumph that must have stirred the German soul to joy, because the very next day, he now remembered, the *Lokalanzeiger* * had boastfully added: "No village or farm was left standing, no road was left passable, no railroad track or embankment, nothing, nothing whatever, not a tub, not a bench for those who will succeed them in the abandoned places. *What they could not take with them they have burnt or smashed.* In front of our new positions runs an Empire of Death—a Death which lays the shrivelled hands of destruction upon *all the works of Man and all the bloom of Nature.*" This, "by order of the High German Command."

It was the last word of Barbarity! But what the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Lokalanzeiger* did not tell their readers, Jeb now realized with a shudder, would have made a chapter of degeneracy and revolting crime unparalleled in history.

Yet, even in the face of this, he turned sick at the thought of going forward to the certain annihilation awaiting him in that ghostly wilder-

* *Berlin Lokalanzeiger,* March 27, 1917.

ness of mist and wet and wreckage ahead. On the other hand, how in God's name could he keep from going, he asked himself, when the blood of innocents was calling on every side! He felt again the "something strong within him which commanded";—but he hated it!

Had Dr. Barrow been sufficiently skillful with the knife, he might have dissected out this better Jeb who insisted on going forward, and let the other crawl into a shell hole to hide for the rest of time; then both Jebs would have been supremely satisfied. But, being first and foremost a courageous man, he did not suspect that any one of his unit could possibly falter. Jeb knew this, and it made him feel all the more alone.

They reached a rise in the rolling landscape and stopped to breathe their beasts which were shaking the heavy limbers by their desperate gasps for air. The ground sloped down and up again, and there, protected from the enemy, a new world came into view—a world wherein American, French and English engineers, commanding an army of construction, worked fev-

erishly, as ants. For an instant the nobler Jeb prevailed, and he raised his eyes in a mute prayer of thankfulness for this trio of forces—the strongest combination the world has ever seen! The rumbling cannon ceased to jar his nerves, while he gazed wistfully at the low clouds sweeping by in companies that seemed to hasten from this theatre of wrath. Occasional gusts of white smoke burst into being just beneath them and hung a moment suspended before racing on; or a distant squirt of lace-like shrapnel, curving ever downward, came to see what went on behind the Allied lines.

Beyond these gusts and squirts of man-made clouds, observation balloons—the "sausages" of the enemy—floated motionless above the horizon, sometimes catching a fleck of sunlight and glistening like dull silver. There were no German fliers in the air that day, but high above, as gray vultures hungrily soaring over one spot, two American, two British and four French airmen glided back and forth, in and out, circling, circling. With such grace and ease did they pirouette through their reconnaisance that Jeb was reminded of an aerial quadrille being

danced five thousand feet above the earth; or, seeming to tire of this, one of them would change the play to hide-and-seek, point toward the translucent blue and scoot behind a cloud, with the others following. It was a cordial invitation for the Boche to come up and fight! Jeb did not see them again for several minutes, but he noticed that one of the kite balloons suddenly burst into a little puff of flame and disappeared. Unconsciously, he grinned.

"*Sacre bleu!*" the *poilu* cried delightedly. "More honor to our '75's'!"

"I thought the planes did it!" Jeb turned in surprise.

"Oh, no, Monsieur! That was done by one of our guns six miles away!"

Below the pirouetting airmen there was no poetry of motion. Here men strained and panted and wiped grimy sweat from their eyes. A month ago this ground ahead had been vigorously contested—the very spot on which Jeb now stood had been well within the German lines.

In the thoroughness with which the engineers were making fast their gains, a military ob-

server would have read that not only would the Allied army draw the sting from this "empire of death," but that never again would this part of France be yielded to alien hands. As far as the eye could reach roads were being improved, others made; the buried railways were being excavated, metals straightened, or replaced if too far bent; shell-proof dug-outs were having their finishing touches, some to be used as dressing-stations for the wounded whom tomorrow might bring in, others for storing ammunition. In a nearby wood, where trees had been reduced to little more than gaunt trunks barren of leaf and twig, observation posts were built with many tons of branches hauled from the rear, and so artfully wired in place that the stricken giants seemed almost ready to live again. This work in itself constituted reason enough for the Allied airmen to sweep the sky of German observers, since only by "putting out the enemy's eye" could such secrets of camouflage be preserved. Wells were being bored by gas engine power and pipes laid, as spider webs, to bring untainted water to man and beast. Then, of course, shallow trenches

had to be dug for telephone wires which otherwise would perish in the first onslaught of artillery fire.

Among the trenches of greater magnitude, recently pounded to the point of obliteration, activities were being pressed at highest tension, for here the destruction had been particularly severe. The Germans had held them well, but no human agency could have prevailed against the unfaltering valor of the Allies. Now they were in Allied hands, and being prepared for Allied shelter. From sunken approaches to the assembly trenches, and from there forward through an intricate maze of communicating passages to the firing trench, tens of thousands of men were busy with pick and shovel—not, however, constructing the narrow, steep-sided affairs which proved so disastrous to the Germans on the Somme, but a shallower type of trench having more flare and a wider sole. Just behind them worked the plumbers and pipemen, the carpenters and timber placers, the electricians with their coils of wire and telephones; everything perfected with the greatest nicety today, which tomorrow—or the next, or next,

tomorrow—would be buried for future plowshares. War could not be war unless it were the highest expression of construction and destruction, even as it raises life and death to the highest power of sublimity!

Boring like huge worms from the front line outward, were tunnellers, biting into the earth with grim persistence to lay mines beneath the enemy; not that this work would be finished in time for tomorrow's action, wherein plans were already completed to press forward, but should the German positions prove firm enough to establish another temporary deadlock, then they would serve a purpose. By such forethought are battles won, when nothing is underestimated, nothing overlooked, no shade of opportunity neglected, and all chances accounted for.

"I never dreamed it was so gigantic a game as this," Jeb gasped.

"But there is much more, Monsieur," his companion smiled.

"Does no one ever rest?" Jeb asked, in a voice of awe.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur," the *poilu* smiled again. "In places where the trenches have been cleared

and mended, where telephone wires have been connected to instruments, where water pipes have been brought down and fauceted, flooring built across mucky places, gas gongs installed, ammunition, grenades and tinned food stored in the newly finished shell-proof chambers, you will find a few over-exhausted men sprawled out, sleeping."

While Jeb could see nothing of this, the driver promised to get him into it soon enough—a suggestion that turned him away in search of other scenes and thoughts. Off to the right two lines of snags marked what had once been graceful poplars edging a famous *route national,* but now——! He glanced quickly backward along the direction from which he came. Here, at first, a brighter prospect met his eyes: the far-off rolling slopes were green, the far-off woods had not been stripped of leaves; but never could the grim story be quite wiped out for, across this verdant scene, as a long, thin reptile with a million legs, crawled an endless line of artillery and munition trains.

"Can't I ever get away from it!" he cried to himself, shutting his eyes in agony.

The horses had been rested and word came to proceed; the limbers creaked and moved. Jeb gripped the seat in terror, feeling now that before they got half way down the slope a German gunner would pick them out and touch the magic spring which reduces men—not symbolically but literally—to dust. Yet he breathed more freely and sent another prayer up for the engineers when almost at once they entered a sunken road, converging toward the enemy although keeping well out of sight. At places where the terrain did not admit of this shelter, or other roads went off at tangents, long strips of canvas were stretched across the openings, their outer sides being painted, in theatre scenery fashion, to represent the surrounding ground. If the Germans had only known that thousands of troops and thousands of tons of ammunition passed daily within easy range of their guns, protected by a wall of 10-ounce canvas! Another important reason for sweeping their planes from the sky!

The *poilu* called Jeb's attention to these ingenious devices of camouflage, seeming to think them a great joke.

"But for the good God having made the Boche, Monsieur, I should call them asses with long ears for never estimating our *finesse* and resource."

"It wouldn't be disrespectful, Frenchie," one of the unit laughed, "because the good God made asses, too!"

"Well, Monsieur, I feel there should be an apology somewhere! Perhaps it is to the four-footed asses."

They climbed down at last and, each loaded with supplies, tramped through half a mile of communicating trenches to the protected dressing-stable dug-outs—roomy affairs, twenty feet below the surface and opening rearward into a kind of quadrangle. Five hundred yards ahead were the firing trenches, where things would happen; and the *poilu,* observing this, grimly remarked:

"*Sacre bleu!* They certainly have ordered you up to the very front, Monsieur! 'Tis not often the women are brought so close—but it means, Monsieur, that our Generals are positive of driving the Boche far back tomorrow!"

The chief surgeon in charge here rushed to

meet them with open arms, embracing Dr. Barrow warmly; and then Barrow stepped back to look at him, for this was the great Bonsecours! Georges Bonsecours! He saw a man of medium height, and of medium build, slightly gray about his temples, and in the neighborhood of forty years of age. No one of these things was particularly distinguishing, but when he spoke—ah, then the impelling magnetism which drew others close to him, the force which sent them flying off to various duties, was easily explained. His eyes, while twinkling merrily as though everything in life possessed a touch of humor, also gave the impression that they could see beneath five layers of skin tissue—that by some canny second sight they could detect a piece of shrapnel without the aid of probes or X-ray; but a closer inspection showed that they were set in a face which had become seamed by weariness. His arms, also, hung with a directness that indicated great fatigue.

While supplies were being stored away and the women nurses had retired for a needed rest, the world-famed surgeon escorted Dr. Barrow

farther down the line of dressing-stations, particularly to see his own unit which had been in this sector since the middle of April.

"Monsieur le Doctor," he said,—then continued in beautiful English—"I am greatly impressed with the fortitude of your American women who have assisted me. There is one—but why mention one, when they all typify to my mind graceful columns of ivory; pure in their strength and certainty, crystal in their thoughts and deeds! My operating table is a Grecian temple, Monsieur, when they surround it."

"That is a beautiful tribute," said Barrow, flushing with pride.

"Not as beautiful, Monsieur, as the inspiration and assistance which one of them has given me." He stopped, blushing like a girl, then continued frankly with an infectious smile: "We learn to be outspoken on the edge of No Man's Land—perhaps it is because we never know at what moment our lips may be completely sealed that we appreciate the value of saying fearlessly what is in our minds; therefore I will finish by telling you that, next to an

Allied victory, my greatest hope is that she may be persuaded to share my fortune in Paris, after we are finished with the fortunes of war!"

"I could wish no girl better luck than that." Barrow smiled. "To us at home you stand as a kind of demi-god, a wizard, who——"

"Ah, Monsieur, I have accomplished nothing, really, until I came here, where her sympathy and bravery have made me see new things! I tell her that she inherits these traits from an angel mother and an American Indian father."

Both men laughed delightedly; Dr. Barrow little dreaming at the moment that this American girl, beloved by every one around her, was the daughter of an old friend who edited a paper down—or was it up?—in Hillsdale.

"You see that we are close to things here," Bonsecours continued, as they walked along.

"I had wondered about the women being so near the front," Barrow replied.

"Well, Monsieur, in some sectors this position is safer for them than farther back—only, of course, when our artillery and line is as strong as here, and the dressing-stations as

well protected. Besides," he added softly, "we are needing many nurses, and have lost fearfully in men and orderlies."

The sun set clear that evening, putting a sparkle in the air which touched one's nerves like wine. Shortly before twilight Jeb was drawn to the entrance of his dug-out by the tramping and sloshing of many feet. He walked the length of the quadrangle to where it joined a communicating trench and for half an hour—even after the night had grown too dark to see distinctly—watched an incessant line of soldiery moving forward to positions. Tramp, tramp, they went, under orders of silence, because something big was on the boards for tomorrow. But 'twas not the quiet of glumness that enveloped them, for they showed in every step an elasticity of spirits, as of muscles. He might have called it a fluid line, so lithely did it flow by; he might have called it a line of gods, so proudly did each man hold his steel-capped head!

The firing trench lay about six hundred yards from the German first line; six hundred yards of No Man's Land waiting passively for the

shambles! Jeb wrung his hands and leaned against the earthen wall. With that stark struggle for existence but a few hours off, how was it possible for men to step out happily! What would he be doing, were he amongst them!

The line was still passing, coming out of the impenetrable and marching—who knew where! when he stumbled through the dark entrance of the dug-out.

"What's going on out there?" a comrade asked.

"Ghosts," he answered, feeling for his bunk and throwing himself face down on it.

He was tired to exhaustion, his nerves were starved for rest. The dug-out was chilly after sundown and he reached fumblingly for his blanket, found himself lying upon it and awkwardly wriggled under.

The warmth was good. In a little while the steady tramp of men going to kill or die—for 'tis thus the gods play with us!—became a soothing lullaby, and lured him into sleep.

CHAPTER X

From this deep slumber Jeb was aroused by the very incarnation of doomsday noises that sent him bounding to the floor with nerves aquiver. The blanket dragging after him hung from his shoulders, even as bewilderment and sleep clung to his mind. His senses knew that it was night, although details about him were brought into sharp relief by a thousand flashes spasmodically flooding the dug-out with fiendish brilliancy; and he knew that his body was cold, although the walls and timbers seemed to be consumed by raging fires. He felt the ground trembling in the throes of a titanic upheaval, while his entire being seemed to be hammered and torn by the frightful cataclysm of sounds. He stood as though paralyzed, unmindful that bits of earth and gravel were sifting through chinks between the ceiling timbers and falling on his head.

Other members of the unit had staggered into wakefulness and sat staring at him, he thought, with greenish, flickering faces—accusingly, as if he were responsible. Each knew the French guns had searched out and were crumbling up the German defenses, but none had previously suspected that an artillery bombardment could reach such fury. The desultory firing of yesterday might well be understood as a *moment decalme!*

In this instant of terrified amazement Jeb and his comrades remained as statues, simply staring with owlish eyes devoid of intelligence, since it was well nigh impossible for men, uninitiated, to master their faculties until the first shock had been absorbed.

'Twas not so much the roar of cannon from their distant places in the rear—although these alone might doubtless have been startling enough—but the shower of projectiles falling on the doomed line only six hundred yards across No Man's Land. In answer to this bombardment from an eight-mile line of guns accurately trained the day before, enemy guns, trained with lesser accuracy, did their best to

inflict an equal punishment. The effect was a combination of the solemnity and the littleness of man which defies every knack of human expression to depict.

The seasoned soldier could have told some things; he could have distinguished calibre from calibre as readily as the skillful fox hunter knows the position of his racing hounds by the quality of their voices. He could have spotted the vindictive crash of "75's," the deep-toned bellowing of "heavies," or, nearer by—had they been in action—the banging of trench mortars. In the sky he could have told from white or greenish-orange flashes, from lace-like wreaths or fixed-star blasts, where shrapnel or high explosive shells had burst; from the ringing of a gas gong he could tell where "green cross" shells were falling; he could, and gladly would, have explained—to his own satisfaction, at least—the many freak phenomena: a solitary light spirally ascending upward until lost in the clouds; sprays of fire and spark-showers illumining the sky; rainbow arcs of angry red that flickered, as an aurora borealis, from horizon to horizon.

But the uninitiated Medical Corps unit, numbed to inertia, was only sensible to an overhead riot of screeching demons, as shells hurtling forward were passed and answered by shells hurtling back—a sky of flying steel and a horizon of blasted earth! In moments of greatest concussion, simultaneous with the most blinding flashes, the air about their faces seemed to jump; crazy little vortexes scurried past the dug-out opening, or flew in across the floor, like phantom kittens seized by some curious madness. To Jeb's highly imaginative, and now half-crazed, mind these represented newly liberated souls, in anguish seeking refuge from the hurricane of death and its drenching rain of fire. He had not then found out how many hundreds of shells must be fired to wound one man!

On the Allied side the bombardment, with growing intensity, became a *barrage*. Explosions came as thick as drum taps when a roll is sounded. There seemed to be no intermission, really; no more, at any rate, than one's ear can detect between clicks in a telegraph room when the instruments work rapidly.

Barrow and Bonsecours ran in. They looked weirdly grotesque in the fitful playing of lights, and Bonsecours shouted something, although no voice seemed to issue from his lips. Then with vigorous gestures he beckoned the men up to him—having come especially to get this new unit straightened out, since his own veterans knew exactly what to do.

Jeb had not moved, for the blanket still hung from his shoulders. Neither had the others arisen from their bunks, so bewildered were they also by the chorus of death engines.

"Up now, and active!" the great surgeon yelled. "Stretchers! You go out shortly!"

"Go out!" Jeb screamed, finding his voice in a burst. "Go out!" he screamed again. "God Almighty, no one can go out *there!*"

His face was ghostlike, his eyes were large, staring, vacant. Bonsecours stepped nearer and studied him, bellowing in a tone that had made more than one man obey:

"There are twenty thousand fine fellows, *mon chère enfant,* each about to spring from his trench with the firm belief that if he gets hit we shall bring him in. No man dares break faith

with a friend who thus relies on him!" He had put both hands on Jeb's shoulders and now continued to look steadfastly, honestly into his eyes. Then quickly he kissed him on both cheeks, saying: "I'll believe in you tonight, to do as I would do were my duty not back here!"

A strange feeling of warmth and strength passed through Jeb's veins, but he was given no time for reply, because this man of iron turned to the assembled unit, shouting:

"At dawn this curtain of shells will be lifted and dropped on the Boche second line. That instant our boys go over the top, across No Man's Land. But Germans burrow under ground in a *barrage,* or run out forward and lie down to escape it; so there will still be many with machine-guns left to rake the open stretch, and not all of our brave fellows will get across. It is those," he added, in a voice of thunder, "whom the good God expects us to bring in!"

There was no disobeying this man. Jeb felt sick through and through, but as the others filed out, every second one with a folded stretcher, he, also, followed. Yet he wanted to hold back; he wanted to dash into the darkest niche of the

dug-out, bury his face there and—well, die! To die at once, outright, was preferable to the mental torture of expected laceration and suffering; nor could even the great Bonsecours have convinced him that these two monsters were not crouching, waiting especially for the moment when he should step forth.

While the dressing-station shelters opened into a roomy quadrangle, that in turn connected with trenches, there had also been cut narrow roadways up past the side of each dug-out, ascending sharply toward the front. By this rough and gravelly, though more direct, means, stretcher-bearers could be upon the crest in a twinkling, thence forward and downward over narrow bridges spanning the first line trench to No Man's Land itself.

As the stretcher-bearers of Barrow's unit poured out beneath the sky—or what would have been a sky had not incarnate fiends usurped it—Jeb found himself moving next to Bonsecours. Even in this strain, when men were thinking in terms of armies, the famous surgeon with infinite tact went about supporting the props of one human atom. After all, he

had been trained to mend one man at a time! He spoke no word until they had climbed the sloping roadway and laid flat, peeping over; then, with his lips close to Jeb's ear, he shouted:

"Have no fear! When man calls on the highest expression of his will, he becomes indomitable; he succeeds in the highest terms of success—and thus will you succeed, *mon pauvre enfant!* Look!"

He sprang up, pointing where the fringe of that French fire curtain touched this great stage. The blinding lights flickered over his face and made him supreme at that moment. In the continuous, head-splitting noises of three thousand shells per minute, bursting on an eight-mile segment, he looked more like a war god than an agent of mercy.

The German position was crumbling—rather, it was being blasted out of existence. To Jeb it might have marked the very brink of hell. The flashes were almost as a steady white and greenish-orange blaze, and showed the earth spurting in great bunches upward; stiff winds that had sent clouds scurrying the day before now caught the ground smoke and drew it, as a

sweeping prairie fire, back upon the enemy. This was a propitious wind, and on its wings the death gas sped.

Between the armies lay No Man's Land in utter desolation, but each little detail, each inconspicuous bit of wreckage left from earlier struggles, stood boldly outlined in the calcium glare. This was the stretch of ground he would be searching when the curtain lifted—except that its surface would then be strewn with men; some drawn up in pain, some moaning, some whimpering, some cursing, some terribly still. Had ever a curtain lifted on more poignant tragedy! Was there a parallel in crime to this wholesale slaughter which a treacherous nation thrust upon a peaceful world! Jeb tried to wonder how many dead might be there, but found that his mind would not leave the point of destruction; it had become riveted, as a bird is said to be mesmerized by a slowly approaching snake.

Lying just behind the ridge, feeling the earth tremble beneath his body, waiting for Bonsecours' command to dash into that cockpit of suffering and there mingle with the torn, the

dying and the dead, he repeated over and over the great surgeon's words which bit into him like acid: "It is those whom the good God expects us to bring in!"

The dawn was coming! No sun appeared, but the flashes grew less blinding; the ground close to his face began to show natural browns where formerly had been flickering greens, and his hands looked more alive than dead. Also did the whole scene change as sky and earth increased their fury in this blending of the real and unreal; for, now added to the noises and fitful lights, were huge balls of white smoke, and brown, springing into quick existence; some expanded to balloon size and swept majestically onward, upward; some, caught in a vortex of madness,—swirling, writhing, darting,—formed devilishly gruesome arabesques that yet were formless; some burst like pon-pons; some released long streamers and darted earthward. Jeb's eyes were held by this appalling grandeur; his soul was chained, numbed, by its unlicensed braggadocio.

As though some invisible hand touched the spring of a jumping-jack box eight miles in

length and released twenty thousand monkeys, the trench beneath Jeb seemed to open with a snap. Even above the cannonading he could hear men give vent to savage cheering. But his blood congealed and his fingers dug into the earth, his breath came in agonized gasps, as he watched them rush pell-mell, with bayonets fixed, across that deadly strip of ground.

Then suddenly the artillery ceased. The far-off German guns still roared, but they were as taps of rain upon a roof to ears that had almost bled from other detonations. For a moment Jeb thought he had been stricken deaf, and turned a questioning glance at Bonsecours, whose eyes were staring ahead in strained expectancy.

"See, Americans! The curtain has raised for our brave fellows, and it will now fall on the second line!"

In the immediate silence his voice seemed to be bellowing—then the mighty guns, having lifted the range, crashed out again. Yet, mingled with the blasting of this second line, could be heard the spiteful rattling of machine-guns, the fusillade of rifle fire, as the enemy, scram-

bling to places from the punishment they had just been through, poured death into the headlong charge.

The scene to Jeb now became a phantasmagoria of horrors. Men running with the speed of deer suddenly, and without apparent cause, pitched forward, rose and again went down; some stumbled awkwardly and did not try to rise. But the great wave, like a breaker rolling inward, swept irresistibly. Tired and encumbered though each man was who made up this wave, in a prodigiously short time they were pouring into the German trench.

Such is the accuracy of modern warfare—and of the French, who are the finest artillerymen in the world—that at the expiration of six minutes another appalling silence filled the air. The curtain of fire had again been lifted, to fall this time still farther back; even as the sweeping wave of infantry, without apparently a check, rolled on to take the second German line just emerging from its bath of fire.

Bonsecours seemed too fascinated to give or think of orders, yet he knew the time was not quite ripe, for part of a division had yet to

come up from the assembly trenches in the rear, to form another wave which would go barging after the first.

Streams of these steel-helmeted fellows now began to pass—as the fluid line had passed in yesterday's twilight—close below Jeb. In the broadening daylight he could distinctly see their bronzed, immobile faces; their swinging gait, suggesting abundant reserve power, and their eyes that bespoke an utter disregard of dangers. They were men, second to none in determination and reckless personal valor, who did not endure hardship, but rode upon it; who did not work, without first laughing it into play. If the sun was hot, they sweated good humor; and, if the sky rained torrents, good humor trickled in rivulets down their backs. They had learned to treat flying shells with contempt, except when any of their comrades fell —and then a cold fury would burst amidst their ranks, exploding, not into tears, but oaths! Those oaths!—snapped barkingly from mouth to mouth while death was bursting right and left and overhead, and bayonets were fixing for a greater toll!

Jeb felt, with an uncanny sense of prophecy, that in this marching line was depicted a new phase of man growing out of war. The individual preferment which many of them enjoyed four years ago had thinned to nothingness in the welding of this great warrior-force of comrades, who never again would quite resume their former status. For, when a clubman eats and sleeps and jokes and fights beside the waiter who used to bring his cocktail, he learns to love that man, and the love is mutual; when a millionaire is dragged to shelter by the husky grocer's boy who used to leave a basket at his kitchen door, he also loves that boy, and the boy loves him. Each finds in the other values which are not measured by worldly goods, or the stamp of birth, or family influence; each sees in the naked soul of each truer riches which transcend what formerly had been false. And thus, in the armies of those supermen who after the war march home to lasting peace, the stamp of aristocracy will be the Aristocracy of Worth. It was many months before Jeb realized that, almost unconsciously, he had read this prophecy in the fire of death-dealing shells.

Again the range lifted, this time past a hamlet that stood in partial ruins on a hill. It had been spared complete destruction at German hands, doubtless because the enemy had left it hurriedly, and now the French artillerymen carefully avoided it lest a few old folk and children might be there. The human wave would sweep it clean enough of aliens! Yet that wave had come upon a rocky shore, and Jeb imagined he could hear the metallic clash and rasp of bayonet on bayonet, the gasps and sobs and curses of men fighting without quarter.

The new division just brought up now scrambled over the top, but No Man's Land had been largely stripped of dangers. Victory sparkled in the air; safety smiled at Jeb; with these fellows carrying the battle ever away from him, performing the unbelievable in pluck and endurance, he did not so much mind the thought of going for the wounded! But the uplift was transient—it fled in a panic as Bonsecours called:

"Quick, *mes chère enfants,* be after them! Overlook no one! Let the walking cases get in alone, and bring the others with all haste!

There's one of your American girls in my unit who bids you God-speed! Go!"

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Half a mile to right and left the Germans

were plastering No Man's Land with a pitiless fire, but thus far the ground immediately about him remained scarcely touched. Shells occasionally burst on the trenches just behind, but Barrow's unit luckily was being permitted to go without serious embarrassment. And yet Jeb knew that it was only a matter of time before he and Hastings would receive a blasting. He shivered, jabbering words he could not have recalled a minute later; once cursing himself for a coward, then calling himself a liar for having said it.

There were not as many prone men on the field as he had expected to find. To his bulging eyes which watched the first charge, men seemed to be falling everywhere, but as a matter of fact this was not so.

They had gone quite a third of the distance across when Hastings stopped and unrolled the stretcher, shouting:

"Here's one! Lend a hand, Jeb!"

The coolness of the voice, its utmost naturalness, gave Jeb a most agreeable feeling, and before remembering again that men who drop in battle are things of blood and pain, he was

easing one gently over on the brown canvas.

They started to come in, Hastings at the forward handles, he at the rear; moving as fast as the added weight permitted, skirting shell holes and stepping over fragments of barbed-wire. Crossing the first trench bridge a hundred faces looked up at them, steadily, unemotionally. Another division had been brought up after the second wave swept out, and a few of these fellows now said quietly: "Bravo!" But their thoughts were with the chap who lay silent on the canvas.

Reaching the top of the gravelly roadway that sloped to the dressing-stations, burying their heels in the loose earth which rolled along with them as they descended, the stretcher-bearers saw Barrow in a white jacket, and several white-faced nurses expectantly waiting; for this had been the first man brought in. Even as he was stripped and laid upon the crude table, Jeb and Hastings were well on their way out again.

In four hours No Man's Land had been fairly well cleared of suffering. Although Jeb was growing indifferent to the sight of blood, several times, as a result of extreme fear, he had

been actively sick. The shells were as terrifying as ever; moreover, he and Hastings had to penetrate farther each time in search of wounded. Their last trip took them nearly to the scarp of blasted ground on which stood the half-destroyed hamlet. True, there had been shells bursting within a hundred yards of Jeb; but it so happened that he was particularly engrossed with lifting or easing some of the wounded. Once, when a splinter of steel cut Hastings' sleeve, the lanky westerner gave a whistle.

"That was close," he said.

And Jeb, newly terrified by the words, looked up quickly, asking:

"Did one come by?"

"Well, if it did, it did," Hastings answered. "Cut out your chills, Jeb, and let's get this feller in!"

But Jeb could not "cut out" the chill at once because another shell burst while he was looking, driving him into a panic so acute that Hastings began to swear.

Toward midday the wind fell and the heat became intense. Smoke, acrid and at times

stifling, hung in the hollows like white- and brown-streaked palls, and the unwholesome smell of burning which infests battlefields was sickening. Jeb's clothes were wringing wet, and each time he panted across the first trench bridge he noted how the waiting men under steel helmets were drenched with perspiration. One of them called up to him:

"It's our turn next!—keep an eye open for me!"

The fellow was trying to grin, but succeeded only in making an ugly leer. Jeb read it in a flash—the man was afraid!—and a stinging sense of mortification came over him as he wondered if his own face had been as tell-tale—if it were now as tell-tale!

Over on the battle front, and especially around the half-destroyed hamlet, the Germans were contesting every foot that led to their third line of defense, while the Allies fought with stark madness to dislodge them. The airmen hovering above, having for the third time that day swept the sky of combatants, saw with surprise that armies on both sides were losing cohesion. Some units of the Allies had lost di-

rection, others bored their way through the German line then, finding themselves hemmed in, fought out again; in many places were noticed small groups so intent upon their own little conflicts that they seemed to be having no part in the big game, at all. But these aerial observers realized that the tremendous sledge-hammer blows, directed with consummate skill and resiliency, left the mass of wastage on the German side; for, with strategical and tactical problems suddenly changed from boxed-in trench warfare to the elastic manoeuvers of open battle, the directing mind which is more elastic, all things else being equal, wins the day—and, whatever other virtues the Boche may possess, his mind can hardly be said to expand spontaneously. At the same time, the enemy was dying hard; fortifying at a moment's notice when forced into a corner, and making heroic resistance with machine-guns in patches of woods, craters, or other favorable moulding of the terrain.

When Jeb sweated in behind Hastings at one o'clock he staggered down the road without seeing it. From lack of food, and the horrible wrenching nausea he had suffered, as well as

the terror gnawing more and more into his soul, he was pretty well done for.

Barrow, noting this with the eye of a skilful physician, sent a nurse for black coffee and a bowl of soup, but Jeb rebelled in disgust at the thought of it.

"Come, now," his chief said commandingly, when the nurse returned, "shut your eyes and drink them down, I tell you! We need you, Jeb; you mustn't kick up sick the first day!"

We need you! The words stirred new life in him. Then came a vision of the great Bonsecours as he had pointed toward No Man's Land and cried: "It is those whom the good God expects us to bring in!"

He swallowed the soup and coffee, doggedly turned and followed Hastings up the slope again. But, behind the back of his lanky partner, he was whimpering softly. Never before had the battle scene beyond inspired him with so much terror as now, for its ebb and flow was leaving a greater human wreckage than the Red Cross men could handle. The wounded were arriving at longer periods, because the stretcher-bearers were having farther and far-

ther to go for them; and the disturbing fact was becoming evident that there were less stretcher-bearers than had started out in the morning.

Before Jeb's eyes now the third division barged over the top, leaving the front trench deserted. He saw the line hold beautifully for the first hundred yards, then become more and more phantom-like as it plunged deeper into the pall of smoke. He wondered dully if the fellow who had said: "Watch for me!" had found his nerve, or was still grinning the sickly leer of cowardice.

"That smoke ain't such a bad screen, Jeb," Hastings shouted. "Come on; let's get busy!"

Into it again they passed; many times that afternoon they came out and passed again into it. The last trip took them nearly to the old German first line—since morning blasted level with the ground—before they found a man who had not passed the point of aid. There were plenty about them of the other kind, for machine-guns here had done frightful work. Leading the way back, confused by sounds and smoke, Hastings lost direction, coming within a trice of being picked up and carried by a sud-

den rush of the French troops. Jeb, more insane with fear than anger, cursed him with every oath he had ever heard, but the forward stretcher-bearer, making allowances, went indifferently on.

They had got about halfway when the wounded man suddenly raised up, clutched at Jeb, and fell over to the ground. Jeb dropped the handles and screamed with terror, for it had been a ghastly sight, just a little more than his already badly rattled nerves could stand. But Hastings, turning, kneeled down for a better look; then solemnly arose and pointed with his thumb toward the conflict. Back they started for another load, but this last experience had almost been Jeb's undoing. He was obsessed with the idea that it had been the omen of Death reaching for him; he was gasping pitifully, ever alert for shell fire, and cringing at detonations too far off to be of danger. Try as he would to make his feet go forward, his hands pulled against the stretcher handles, until Hastings turned and repaid him with a longer string of oaths. These, and a memory of the ennobling words of Bonsecours, gave him strength for a

dying and the dead, he repeated over and over the great surgeon's words which bit into him like acid: "It is those whom the good God expects us to bring in!"

The dawn was coming! No sun appeared, but the flashes grew less blinding; the ground close to his face began to show natural browns where formerly had been flickering greens, and his hands looked more alive than dead. Also did the whole scene change as sky and earth increased their fury in this blending of the real and unreal; for, now added to the noises and fitful lights, were huge balls of white smoke, and brown, springing into quick existence; some expanded to balloon size and swept majestically onward, upward; some, caught in a vortex of madness,—swirling, writhing, darting,—formed devilishly gruesome arabesques that yet were formless; some burst like pon-pons; some released long streamers and darted earthward. Jeb's eyes were held by this appalling grandeur; his soul was chained, numbed, by its unlicensed braggadocio.

As though some invisible hand touched the spring of a jumping-jack box eight miles in

length and released twenty thousand monkeys, the trench beneath Jeb seemed to open with a snap. Even above the cannonading he could hear men give vent to savage cheering. But his blood congealed and his fingers dug into the earth, his breath came in agonized gasps, as he watched them rush pell-mell, with bayonets fixed, across that deadly strip of ground.

Then suddenly the artillery ceased. The far-off German guns still roared, but they were as taps of rain upon a roof to ears that had almost bled from other detonations. For a moment Jeb thought he had been stricken deaf, and turned a questioning glance at Bonsecours, whose eyes were staring ahead in strained expectancy.

"See, Americans! The curtain has raised for our brave fellows, and it will now fall on the second line!"

In the immediate silence his voice seemed to be bellowing—then the mighty guns, having lifted the range, crashed out again. Yet, mingled with the blasting of this second line, could be heard the spiteful rattling of machine-guns, the fusillade of rifle fire, as the enemy, scram-

bling to places from the punishment they had just been through, poured death into the headlong charge.

The scene to Jeb now became a phantasmagoria of horrors. Men running with the speed of deer suddenly, and without apparent cause, pitched forward, rose and again went down; some stumbled awkwardly and did not try to rise. But the great wave, like a breaker rolling inward, swept irresistibly. Tired and encumbered though each man was who made up this wave, in a prodigiously short time they were pouring into the German trench.

Such is the accuracy of modern warfare—and of the French, who are the finest artillerymen in the world—that at the expiration of six minutes another appalling silence filled the air. The curtain of fire had again been lifted, to fall this time still farther back; even as the sweeping wave of infantry, without apparently a check, rolled on to take the second German line just emerging from its bath of fire.

Bonsecours seemed too fascinated to give or think of orders, yet he knew the time was not quite ripe, for part of a division had yet to

come up from the assembly trenches in the rear, to form another wave which would go barging after the first.

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him, yet the fruitlessness of such a chase—and, more important still, the unconscious soldier's claim for aid—checked her. Blinded by tears, she dashed up the road and down to the quadrangle, staggered into the dug-out, and cried in a strange voice to Bonsecours:

"There's a man out there I can't bring in!"

He sprang up as if electrified. But her words had not alarmed him so much as her appearance and, in desperation catching her by the shoulders, he demanded:

"What has happened—tell me!"

"N—nothing," she sank upon the box, burying her face in her folded arms. She was sobbing hysterically now, and nurses rarely did this—until they snapped!

"Tell me!—tell me!" he cried, leaning over her, and fighting as he had never fought to keep from holding her close to him. His heart had been too nearly starved, his strength too nearly exhausted, to withstand a scene like this. "If you pity me, tell me what has happened," he implored.

She did not look up, but impulsively reached for one of his hands and pressed it fiercely, al-

most savagely, against her cheek. This must have been the comfort she needed, this touch of a man who was every inch a man, because the sobs at once grew quiet; and, in full control of her nerves, she arose, saying urgently:

"Quick! He's on the trench bridge!"

As in a dream, the great Bonsecours sprang out.

CHAPTER XIII

Jeb dashed blindly ahead, indifferent to shells and death, not caring where he went so that it was toward the thick of battle. He wanted to be killed; he wanted to die as Hastings died, showing the world how real men are capable of making the last big sacrifice. But his torturing conscience laughed at the presumption, for Hastings had typified a faultless courage; and his brain ceaselessly echoed the scorn which Marian had hurled at him, spurring him as rowels of hot steel to greater speed.

The smoke, as a heavy fog, shrouded the uncontested No Man's Land, being quite impenetrable beyond a radius of fifty yards. It was as though he were running constantly beneath a low, flattened dome which kept accurate pace with him, through the sides of whose inverted rim new objects sprang into view with almost magic suddenness. Yet he saw little of any-

thing beyond a girl's look of horror, heard nothing but her outraged words. Scarcely knowing it he hurdled prostrate figures, stumbled into craters, tripped on vagrant ends of wire entanglements, till at last, through sheer exhaustion, he fell face down amidst a small group of the dead.

His maddened race had taken him close to the scene of battle; indeed, he had crossed the old first and second German trenches without observing them, so completely demolished had they been by the French *barrage*. The fighting was yet somewhere beyond, although not waged with anything like the intensity of an hour ago. The artillery had almost entirely ceased, and the lesser rattle of machine-guns was diminishing. Yet he listened, trying to locate the thickest part of it, intending to push there as soon as he regained his breath; but always just above the noises came Marian's burning words, and for awhile he lay with tightly closed eyes, letting them beat upon him as blows.

Gradually, as his breathing grew more normal, other words mingled with hers in a kind

of verbal potpourri—jumbled and unmeaning, yet soon getting clear of the confusion and sounding in his ears like a clarion voice:

"When man calls on the highest expression of his will, he becomes indomitable; he succeeds in the highest terms of success—and thus will you succeed, *mon pauvre enfant!*"

He thought this over with a sense of comfort. It *would* feel good to become indomitable, to succeed in the highest terms of success! Had he ever stopped, and with solemn deliberation called upon the highest expression of his will? He tried to remember. Surely he had given no thought to will power when tossed into the ocean from the sinking ship—nor at any time since coming to this battle front! Each day, from the historic Sixth of April even unto the present minute, he unsparingly admitted, had been spent by him amidst concocted fears and magnified dangers; but never once had he buried his teeth in a single manly purpose, as Tim might have expressed it. This brought Tim to mind, and the many sane things he had said aboard ship. Then another voice, enriched not alone by affection but by the pride of age as it

had spoken 'way back yonder in the Hillsdale *Eagle* office:

"I want to be proud of you," it now said calmly. "You're going out to play a mighty big game, boy, wherein Humanity is trumps, and Patriotism, Righteousness and Service are the other three aces. Yet, even if you hold all these, you may still lose unless you possess one more magic card: Self-respect! We all owe to our soul a certain measure of self-respect, Jeb. It is a gentleman's personal debt of honor to himself, demanding payment before every other obligation, and is satisfied only when we face each of life's crises with steel-tipped, crystal courage!"

Jeb rolled despairingly over on his back, gripping his hands and whispering:

"Oh, God, give me that steel-tipped, crystal courage!"

The sun had set, and with its decline the battlefield grew peculiarly still. A barely perceptible current of air was stirring, and he watched the low canopy of smoke slowly drifting; feeling very small amidst the dead and desolation as he fancied that it might be a si-

lent, winged army of souls gliding eastward to a new dawn.

Suddenly he wondered about the battle—what had become of it! Except for desultory cannonading far to the left, perfect quiet, almost peace, reigned over the darkening ground. In the region where he lay, human passions seemed to have burned into ashes as cold and lifeless as the six or eight calm bodies near to him. He knew the Allies were silently consolidating their gains while, beyond, the Germans strengthened positions for another resistance; the armies of construction were creating what armies of destruction would furiously undo. So uncannily silent had the immediate world become that now, for the first time, he noticed a singing in his ears, caused by twelve hours of hellish concussions—and then, coming more completely to himself, he discovered that for the first time in many days he was hungry.

Jeb sat up and seriously took stock of himself. He had come here to die, but was beginning to resent the very thought of it; he had run to get away from—what? Disgrace and

mortification? Why continue to suffer these if a means were at hand to wipe them off the slate? For what purpose should he be disgraced and mortified if, henceforth, he played a man's part! Near his feet was a dead soldier whose face happened to be turned directly toward him, and through the gathering twilight Jeb saw that the eyes were open, steadily fixed upon him as if waiting to see what he would decide. But this ghastly picture brought him no feeling of revulsion as it might have, earlier; instead, he gazed back for quite a minute, seeming to discover in the dead eyes an expression of reproach so poignant that he finally whispered:

"I don't blame you, old fellow; I haven't done the right thing, at all."

From this he turned to the others about him, and with a new vision saw them in the places they had occupied at home: father, husband, brother, son! His mind leapt the span of miles and looked in upon the anxious faces—hopeful, perhaps—of mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, who waited; and a new kinship sprang up within him for those stricken families of France!

"Oh, the crucifixion of waiting!" he murmured, his eyes again caressing the prostrate forms. For he seemed to be living among men, not dead but yet unborn; helpless, silent, sleeping things whose souls alone were quick—alive somewhere in a wonderful twilight land of peace! Why pity these deserted temples of spirit-heroes! "And to think," he whispered softly, "that you fellows have learned to die! How did it feel? A little gasp?—some dizziness?—surprise, perhaps?—and then God's great entwining arms?"

But the dead eyes staring at him seemed to answer:

"Not until you face it like a soldier of Humanity! Not until you strike a manly blow for the little nations which were ravaged; the women, children, helpless men, ground in the mailed fist of a lying tyrant! God entwines those within His arms who fight for right, not run from it!"

Jeb sprang up, alive to action. Death, then, was but an ephemeral part of this big game; he was fighting not only for today, but for the future; fighting for the peace and righteous-

ness of years to come, long, long after he, in any case, would have been dead! He turned impulsively to the staring eyes, and whispered: "Thanks, old fellow!"—then started toward the new French lines.

Night had fallen, and the world about him was dark except when bathed with the light of star shells, intermittently fired from the opposing armies. Yet he realized that these balls of blinding whiteness must be quite a distance away, since their calcium glare but vaguely penetrated the canopy of smoke, touching the wreckage and the dead with ghost-like iridescence and making them appear almost as unreal as real. He could not even tell from what point these shells were fired, as no spot-lights showed—merely their effect which diffused the smoke alike on all sides.

Suddenly, somewhere behind him, came a sharp rattle of machine-gun fire. He dropped to the ground, listening; wondering in a panic how this fight could have started so far back when he had not even come in touch with the rear French lines. In five minutes all was still again. Either the scrimmage hinged on a false

alarm, or a rush had been made for the possession of some slight point, or—but why guess! Anyhow, it had been short; but, as a barking dog when the night is still will awaken other dogs far across the country-side, so did this brief fusillade draw intermittent firing from many points in more distant places.

Instead of helping Jeb determine his position, these but added to his confusion. Directions of the compass might be anywhere; he was unquestionably lost, with the best of chances for walking into an enemy outpost and being taken prisoner—and he had heard enough of Germany's treatment of prisoners to prefer death rather than capture.

Several star shells must now have been fired from flare pistols somewhere, because objects about him took shape, and he dropped flat, simulating death, not knowing how many eyes were on the watch for movements. When darkness came again his sense of location had not been helped.

Crouching, sometimes crawling on his stomach, but going forward ever more cautiously, he was driven cold with terror when, within

thirty feet of him, out of the very air about him, came low, guttural sounds of talking. The words were German.

His first impulse was to dash wildly through the smoke and escape, but even as his muscles grew taut to make the spring a voice commanded him to halt. It was not an outside voice this time, but one within; and, although trembling, he froze closer to the ground, obeying instantly. Then the sound of a spade thrust into soil, raised and emptied, told of digging. Digging what? Graves? No, the German army, that great Imperial Machine, was being pounded too hard to bother with its dead! The German God could look after them—or the Allies!

Not knowing how to cope with this new situation he began cautiously to crawl away, feeling for a corpse to hide behind should another lot of stars go up and expose him there; yet when his fingers touched a cold, bearded face he nearly cried aloud. A sudden loathing for this inanimate thing almost sent him running;—the next second, answering a silent command, he stretched beside it as though he and it were bunkies in a cantonment. But his heart was

beating unmercifully, confusing his ears which strained for every sound. Regularly the spades and picks continued their work; minute dragged into minute, till another iridescence pierced the smoke. He then peeped out. To his surprise there was but one man in sight; a solitary sentinel standing above an excavation—Jeb could not tell how deep.

When darkness again fell he was more than ever confused. Whether these men were inside their own lines laying mines for an expected advance, or by some cunning had got behind the Allies for a devilish purpose, taxed his ingenuity to decide. At any rate, this was no place for him; no ingenuity was required to determine that. He felt that somewhere to the right the French must be, but it was a guess based largely upon hope. Right or wrong, an effort must be made at once to report this digging party, and slowly he crept off; prone at first, then arising to his hands and knees.

In this way he must have gone a thousand yards when the terrain began sharply to ascend, and more than ever puzzled he stopped again, listening. Only the far off, spasmodic

growling of the "heavies" told that fifteen miles away someone was being unmercifully plastered; but the nearer artillery slept. With eyes and ears straining to their utmost, with muscles held ready to relax and let him flatten out at the first sign of enemies, he continued up this new and very dangerous slope, possessing no idea where it would lead, knowing only that he must reach his own lines before dawn. And now he realized that the air was becoming more pure.

Frequently after sundown in this part of France a light mist rises in the lowlands. To-night there had been no mist, but the terrain had lent itself to cup the hovering battle smoke, holding it in depressions as lakes of vapor, while the higher points stood clear. Jeb was now creeping up one of these higher points; and within half an hour his eyes looked at the stars, his grateful nostrils breathed a pure, untainted atmosphere. Like a snake he slid head-first into the nearest shell hole, climbed warily back to its edge, and watched.

The sky was so bejewelled, the Milky Way so white, that a luminosity bathed the earth about

him which, in contrast to the smoky lowland, seemed almost bright. Before him lay what had once been the little hamlet on the scarp—he recognized it, remembering how the French *barrage* had in mercy been lifted over it. But it had not escaped a severe pounding. A few sections of torn walls, a few chimneys, here and there a gable still supporting one end of a caved-in roof, made a skyline that was saggy, unreal and awe-inspiring. No life was anywhere apparent. Crumbled on its solitary hill, overlooking a white-and-brown streaked sea of smoke that lapped its feet, it typified the most acute expression of desolation.

Having taken his bearings on the North Star and become assured of which way lay the French and British rear, he was leaving the crater when a sound made him draw back again in haste, a muffled sound of iron striking stone.

The old fear bit into him with all its terrors. He was getting weak from hunger, anyway, and his nerves had been through more than ordinary nerves could stand; yet, since the sounds came from somewhere in the ruins they might well mean a villager trying to dig himself out.

'Twas a heartening thought, and Jeb was on the point of creeping forward when a sentry appeared around a pyramid of fallen stones—a tremendous fellow, wearing the Boche uniform. A moment later eight Germans came toward him, picking their way over piles of rubble and carrying spidery things he recognized as machine-guns. Crouching low beneath the crater's side he waited breathlessly, while they passed so near that he could smell their sweaty clothing. After several minutes he peeped out; the sentry and they had disappeared. Without doubt this was a night party fortifying the ruined hamlet on the scarp; but, if that were so, where in the name of God, he asked himself, could the Allied army be!

Objects were now growing more distinct, and for an instant he was driven cold with terror believing this to be the sign of dawn; but a silvery glow in the eastern sky proclaimed a rising moon. In imminent danger of discovery when this should become still brighter he dared not remain in the shell hole. On the other hand, fear had him pinioned with such long claws that he hardly dared to move at all; and had

one German, wounded and defenseless, come upon him then demanding his surrender he could not have raised a finger in defense. He merely wanted safety now; a place to hide—he cared not for how long. His ears had closed to the stern demands of will power; the words of Mr. Strong, and Bonsecours, and even Marian, had lost their potency. An appeal more powerful than all of these was needed to raise him to the place of man!

Ahead, almost at his hands, were scattered bricks and clay chunks of blasted buildings; but twenty feet beyond stood a section of upright wall, supported beneath by twisted doorway timbers and propped by the wreckage of a roof which, at one side, reached the ground. It was a forbidding place, seeming on the point of tottering over, although this very danger might grant it immunity from German searchers.

Making himself as flat as possible he wriggled forward, listened a moment at the threshold, then crept inside and crawled to the farthest, darkest corner. The next instant his blood was congealed by a piercing scream not three feet from his face.

CHAPTER XIV

Out of the darkness, right into his face, this scream came, ending in a weak, despairing, but above all else heartrending, moan; then everything grew still. Jeb could have neither moved nor uttered a cry; he had recoiled in terror, crouching as a part of the fallen masonry that littered the floor.

Almost at once quick steps resounded through the ruined streets, scrambling over heaps of wreckage and coming nearer until they passed with a kind of ruthless determination just outside the tottering wall. In another moment they had turned an angle and the sentry, silhouetted against the lighter sky, stood peering through the doorway. He barked something in German that had an ominous sound, and the nearby voice began an hysterical whimpering, interspersed with pleading in rapidly spoken French which Jeb partially understood. At

least, he realized a girl was in this dark place with him, and that she was promising to make no further outcry. Weak and thin her voice seemed, though rasping in a kind of frenzy, as she attempted to excuse a former disobedience by trying to explain how someone had come and frightened her. Luckily for Jeb the man gruffly interrupted with another flow of German, or his fate might then and there have been sealed.

"Please—please," the girl moaned, "oh, please don't come in! I won't cry again!"

He hesitated, as if considering; then growled a threat and turned back.

Waiting until he had quite gone and the last sound of his boots upon the rubble had died away, Jeb summoned his French and cautiously whispered:

"I'm your friend—don't make a noise!"

A slight movement in the corner first answered him, then a wee voice asked:

"Is Monsieur English?"

"No, American."

The sound which followed this lingered in his ears long afterward. It was scarcely a gasp, nor moan, nor groan, but an inarticulate ani-

mal sound expressive of what the body feels when snatched in the nick of time from destruction. A moment later she had crawled through the darkness; her hands passed quickly over his sleeve, his shoulder, then found his neck and clasped it passionately.

Drawing her gently to his lap he realized that she was merely a child who had come to him—a skeleton child, of perhaps eight or nine years old, seeming to be little more than bones dressed in scanty clothing. Touching his lips to her cheeks he whispered encouragement, promising prodigious things without regard to their possible accomplishment, until her body ceased to quiver. Then she whispered tremulously:

"Are you the American who fed us?"

"No, little one, I haven't fed you." He, too, spoke in the merest whisper.

"But yes, Monsieur, indeed you did! *Le bon curé* said the American gave us food for many, many months. Oh, I wish I had some now!"

"He meant the American Relief, little one. Haven't you any food now?"

"Not since two days, Monsieur. The Boche," he felt her quiver again as she pronounced this

name, "used to take our American food and give us their own black kind; but the curé told us to submit gracefully, as those who had tried to object were killed. But two days ago a German, a Kommandantur, they called him, Monsieur, said that he felt so very, very sorry for us he thought we had better starve; and since then we have had nothing."

"Where is the curé now?" he asked, feeling himself grow hot with rage.

"Dead, Monsieur. They killed him for trying to defend his bell."

"Defend his bell?"

"Quite so, Monsieur." She snuggled into a more comfortable position, as though the presence of this American removed all dangers; she found it good, furthermore, to talk to someone, even in whispers, and amidst ruins, and about the horrors buried there. "Before blowing up the Marie they lowered the bell—for everything iron in the village they said must be sent into Germany. But the curé loved his bell—so did we all, Monsieur—and he threw his arms about it, pleading. But this made the soldiers laugh very much." She waited an instant, as though

listening, then continued: "So they got a blanket, Monsieur, and tossed him into the air, but always let him fall upon the stones. He was very old, was *le bon curé,*—but so good! Then officers came up, and they carried open bottles of wine, and around their necks were strung on cords many women's finger rings and bracelets. My mother uttered a prayer, because she thought they would help *le bon curé,* but when they were told he had tried to protect his bell, they jumped over and over him, Monsieur, pretending to prance like horses, and kept sticking him with their spurs until his poor face was cut and swollen. We cried out for shame, but he held up the Crucifix toward us and gently shook his head—so we turned away weeping. But they let us bury him, Monsieur," she added, tenderly.

"Where are your parents?" Jeb asked, shuddering not alone at the tale of barbarity, but because this young child had become so inured to these sights that she could passively recite them.

"Dead, Monsieur," she answered, in a tone that might itself have been dead. "Quite

dead," she added, dispiritedly. "My father was summoned with many others to Avricourt. When they came back the Germans marched him past our house tied to the tail of one of their horses, but would not let us speak to him; yet he turned his face so we could see a blue cross marked upon his cheek, and then my mother fainted—she was not well, Monsieur. That night they shot him."

Her poor little body was beginning to shake, but he drew her closer with soothing words, while his heart was wrung by pity. For the moment he forgot what had been uppermost in his mind: to discover through her if this place lay within the German lines and how far were the Allies. She took courage from his endearments and continued, although in the same lifeless whisper:

"The next day they marched my mother and other women away, Monsieur. I ran after her but was thrust back; yet she called telling me to hide the children in the cellar."

"Then your mother may not be dead," he suggested hopefully.

"But yes, Monsieur. I watched them for a

great way along the road—there are no trees now, and I could see. Several times she fell; the last time a soldier raised his gun twice, and twice brought it down. Oh, I wanted to help her then, but they laughed and held me!"

Jeb was growing beside himself at these unheard-of barbarities, but he managed to ask gently:

"Why are you not in the cellar now?—listen!"

The sound of iron striking stone again reached him. She understood, and answered quietly:

"It is where they dig, Monsieur. They have been doing it since sundown; and it was their coming and going through the cellars that made me bring the children here, in fear of them."

"But where are the children?" he asked, for no sound had come from the corner she had left.

"There are three, Monsieur, in the dark behind me. Two live, but they do not know me any more. They are so young," she said apologetically, "that the things they have seen quite

put out their minds—but they obey me, very nicely."

"Merciful God," he gasped.

"The other," her voice resumed its tone of dull despair, "was killed but a little while ago by the man who looked in. Monsieur, we were very hungry and frightened, and she was crying; but I tried—oh, how I tried—to comfort her! Then in anger he came, and—and stuck her with the long knife on his gun. Oh, Monsieur," she whispered, clinging to him in a new terror, "I was glad for the darkness!"

A sob, arising from the very depths of Jeb's soul, burst from his lips. Scalding tears of rage and anguish streamed down his cheeks; and these must have touched her upturned face, for she raised a thin hand and patted him, whispering:

"You are very kind, Monsieur, to weep for her."

"My poor little child," he moaned, "my poor little child! Oh, what a plight they've left you in!—with only the dead, and worse than dead!"

The moon had cleared by now, bathing the ruined hamlet with a silvery sheen, although

the place which sheltered them remained in darkness. But through a rift in the broken wall stole one narrow beam of light, and he moved slightly to let this fall upon her face—then just in time caught himself, else he would have given a cry of pain and fury.

Her eyes, horrified and shadowed by the cruelties she had witnessed, were turned to him; great, dark, hollow eyes which seemed to be looking directly through him to some confusion of thoughts beyond. Her face was pinched and blue with lack of nourishment, the skin stretched tightly over cheek bones which seemed about to push through; her lips were wax-like, dry and cracked, and her ears were almost transparent. But even more appalling than any of these was the utter despair, the absence of hope or desire of life, that had changed the bloom of youth to the decay of age. She might have been the wan ghost of a shrivelled old woman lying in his arms, instead of young flesh and blood!

This martyred child, who should be sleeping happily amidst dreams of dolls and play—what was the ghastly thing into which she had been

made? The father, who with horse and plowshare should be summoned by the morning cock to yielding fields—where was that servant of the vineyard? The mother, who should be planning for the harvest which her capable hands would convert into winter comforts—what of her? A wee tot, whose sobbing should have been stilled by tender arms—did she understand the caress of steel? And the other two, whose minds had been snapped by horrors and privations—did their locked-in souls realize these things to be the result of military necessity?—or a nation's degeneracy!

Yet what could he expect from a people whose idol in philosophy, their pampered Nietschke, teaches and writes: "Morality is a symptom of decadence! There is no right other than that of theft, usurpation and violence!" It is in his book for all to read! What hope of an army, or hope of mercy from it, whose Kaiser confesses himself to be a liar or a lunatic by proclaiming: "The spirit of God has descended upon Me because I am the German Emperor! I am the instrument of the Most High. I am His sword, His representative on earth. Woe

and death to those who oppose My will! Death to the infidel who denies My mission! Let all the enemies of the German nation perish. God demands their destruction—God, who by My mouth summons you to carry out His decrees!''*

As Jeb recalled these utterances, their blasphemy made him cringe. He wrapped the little broken body tighter in his arms. Was she, then, what she was by a loving God's decree? He kissed her hair and groaned in righteous anger. Did that Outcast Emperor dare call himself the representative of God on earth, and thereupon urge his menials to do evil for the sake of evil, destroy for destruction's sake, pillage for the bestial love of it, outrage the life, honor and liberty of the helpless, leaving a wide trail that everywhere led to the most loathsome crimes?—did ''the spirit of God descend upon'' this vampire, and call him ''chosen''?

Jeb found himself trembling in every muscle as a deep rage at these blasphemies spread throughout his frame. As tropic storms strike

* From the Kaiser's proclamation to his army, Sept. 13, 1914.

languid forests, swaying, threshing, rending trees this way and that, so a mighty rush of fury swept him. Slowly at first, then faster, the almost forgotten taper flame of manliness that flickered on the altar of his inmost being leaped higher, until it blazed as a consuming fire. The eyes of his soul were open; the strength of his soul grasped the sword of Humanity to strike for this child, and the thousands like her, whose injury was irreparable, who had been blasted, damned, by the ego-mania of accursed hypocrites!

"Oh, little one," he whispered to her fiercely, "if all the boys back home could see the things you've shown me, they'd break their necks getting over here to smash that upstart German power!"

For a moment he bowed his head, as though in prayer. The far-off rumbling of cannon, sublimely rising from the distant horizon, might have been a deep-toned organ sending its hymn of victory through the vaulted space; and, while he listened, the little hand was raised again to touch his cheek, as the weak voice murmured:

"Monsieur, I feel better since you came."

"I must get you away," he kissed her quickly. "Now listen well, and answer well, for everything depends on what you know!"

The indomitable spirit of France which kept these people alive through hardships and outrages that will never be written, bounded through her veins and warmed them. He felt her body snuggle more confidingly, as if to assure him that he would not be disappointed in her share of this new partnership.

After careful questioning he learned enough to open his eyes. The French lines had indeed passed northward, leaving this ruined hamlet in its wake. But for several months prior to yesterday's engagement the Germans had been working on gigantic subterranean operations, beginning at the levels of the cellar floors and penetrating downward until the entire village sub-area had been converted into a kind of catacomb. Here a great number of machine-guns were stored with quantities of ammunition, and a garrison put in charge which numbered upwards of two thousand men. A machine-gun regiment, he mentally noted. These had fought when the French came but, instead of retreat-

ing, ducked into the sub-cellars and closed the openings which had been artfully contrived to escape notice. When the French passed, thinking the enemy had been driven before them, the Boche quietly emerged after nightfall and slipped away in several directions, taking many guns and spades and boxes of ammunition.

Jeb felt that he now understood the mystery of that digging party back on the plain, as also the nearer sounds. They were units of this garrison—and there must be many others like them scattered about—fortifying for a particular counter attack tomorrow when, with a line of machine-gun sections operating in the Allied rear, defeat might be turned to victory. It was an audacious scheme, thus to burrow while a victorious army passed over them, and then come up out of the ground and strike again!

"How far is it to the place they're digging here?" he asked.

"Just there, beyond this wall—but a little ways," she pointed in the direction from which the sentry had come.

"How many are there?"

"I could not say, Monsieur; but few, assur-

edly, as I saw quite as many as I thought were in the ground, and more, slip away after dark with the guns and spades and boxes."

"Then wait very quietly till I come back," he lifted her from his lap, but she clung desperately and would have cried had he not promised to return safely.

She let him go then and he crawled away, passing just outside the door to see if the street were clear. Skirting the torn walls and keeping in the heavier shadows, creeping over piles of rubble as silently as a rat, he came at last to a point which overlooked the hole where men toiled, wearily, though in desperate haste. The sentry paced back and forth within a hundred feet of him, sometimes speaking in monosyllables to his comrades below.

At highest tension Jeb waited, until he felt not only sure of their strength but reasonably certain that no others remained in the lower strata of catacombs; because they rested at frequent intervals, implying a state of exhaustion, and this, in turn, indicated an absence of relief shifts. Fifteen men in all were there, besides the sentry. On the street level their rifles

had been stacked. The hole—a machine-gun redoubt—in which they dug was about five feet deep; the sides were steep; the only weapons near at hand were picks and spades.

Tingling with excitement, he stole carefully back to the ruined door and entered, bringing with him a stout club picked from the débris. The girl's arms flew about him at once, and the wan voice whispered tremulously:

"Oh, Monsieur, if you had not come!"

"But I did come," he took her again upon his lap, seeming in a much better humor than when he had gone out. "We're about to get away, little one; are you big enough to do just what I say?"

There was a look of reproach in her eyes which he could not, of course, have seen, but he felt her arms tighten.

"Everything," she whispered. "Can Monsieur carry the little sisters?"

"Monsieur can, but he isn't going to," he muttered fiercely. "They'll have two-legged horses to ride, and so will you. Now, I'm going over by the door, and when I get there I want you to give a loud cry."

"Oh, Monsieur," she trembled, "he will come and—and——"

"I want him to come, but he won't do any more than that. We're going to take those men and punish them for a lot of things they've done."

"Capture them, Monsieur?—by Monsieur's own self?"

"By Monsieur's own self," he gave her a squeeze, then sat her back upon the ground. "Now, when I get close to the door, cry!—then you may close your eyes until I say look; but don't cry again, whatever happens."

Picking up the club he took a position in the deepest shadow and waited. Spartan little soldier that she was, she now sent a wail into the night that would have brought a dozen sentries; then, as before, everything was silent. Also, as before, hurried, angry steps soon were heard; yet this time, as the sentry passed close outside the rear wall, he talked. Jeb at first thought that it might be the mumbling of an enraged man, but he took a tighter grip upon his club when another voice laughed a reply.

The two Germans turned the angle of the

side wall, stumbling over loose stones and uttering words that scarcely needed translation. A patch of moonlight fell athwart the sill, and Jeb watched this, knowing it would tell better than his ears when the crucial time had come. The men were just outside now, and the breathing of one became audible—a workman, doubtless, following to see what would happen. Then a shadow fell across the spot of light, and slowly a bayonet glided within two feet of Jeb's face —the bayonet that might yet be warm from having dried a child's tears! After it came the sentry, stooping as he entered, while his companion, who chortled with a kind of insane glee, pressed closely at his heels.

Jeb had been standing in deep shadow to one side, with the club drawn back. He waited until both men were well within the door, then made a vicious swing, and then another; there were two sharp cracks of wood on bone, and the two who had come to kill lay dead.

"It's all right," he whispered through the darkness. "Bring the children, quick!"

"Thank God, Monsieur," her voice reached him.

Kneeling, he stripped the sentry of ammunition, examined the rifle until he had mastered its mechanism, and saw that it was loaded and ready. When the children reached him—the two smaller ones staring vacantly ahead as if walking in their sleep—he whispered:

"Now, do just as I say: follow closely, keep in the shadows and make no noise. When I put back my hand, stop and wait; when I call, come at once. Is that clear, little one?"

"But, oh, Monsieur," she panted, "should we not run now?"

"We couldn't make it, for one thing," he answered slowly, "and, besides, I—I don't think I'll ever run again, little one," he stooped and kissed her—although she did not understand. "Ready? Come along!"

CHAPTER XV

He felt the call now of three great forces: America, Humanity, and his soul—but the greatest of these was Humanity! Each held him by a new, a strong appeal; each looked confidently to the best there was in him, wrapped him in entreating arms that struggled to inspire the highest type of courage.

Carefully the little refugees followed him out into the calm moonlight, the tots whose minds had gone back to shadowland acting as automatons under the silent direction of their sister. He stopped once, as though with indecision, and looked at them; then set his teeth fast and again went on. Hugging the snagged walls, crossing open places on hands and knees, they came finally to the spot Jeb had previously selected for them to wait, while he crept ahead to reach the pyramids of stacked rifles before letting his presence be known.

He could distinctly hear the sounds of digging now, but there was no exchange of words —doubtless the stilled sentry had been the only loquacious spirit among them. This presence of human beings laboring in silence at dead of night made his task decidedly ticklish, and minutes passed before he gained a position behind the last pile of rubble, overlooking the hole.

Besides the fourteen Germans he had expected to see below, he now made out one other, an officer, who, doubtless because he sat well beneath the opposite wall, had escaped observation during the first reconnaissance. This brought the total to fifteen—three clips of cartridges and no misses, he told himself, if it came to a fight. The men toiled surlily, as though that beaver-like industry, everywhere displayed by the German army in fatigue work, had about reached the quitting point. It was, moreover, possible that they sulked for having been detailed to a duty which meant almost certain death.

Jeb did not know how to challenge them, but a pointed rifle and a stern command in any language is never difficult of translation between

soldiers of opposing armies. He saw now that six of them were laboring with a large stone, and there could be no more favorable time for him to act. With a bound he reached the edge.

"Hands up!" he barked.

The fifteen faces turned to him were blank with astonishment.

"Hands up!" he repeated.

The officer, first to recover, made a quick reach for his pistol, and Jeb dropped him in his tracks. This shot, and its effect, broke the spell. Spades and picks were thrown aside, the stone fell with a crash, and the men, thoroughly cowered, raised their hands, calling: "Kamerad! Kamerad!"—the same old cry that has rung from Verdun to the sea, although Jeb was hearing it for the first time.

By gesture he commanded them to climb out, one at a time, and in single file to march farther away from the rifles, since at some personal cost they might have yet attempted a rush and overpowered him. But there was no rush in these exhausted men, and, except for a few who showed signs of relief, they took the situation with stolid gravity.

In a hundred yards he halted them and called the child, who came bravely out of hiding with the remnants of her family; but, confronted by the grimly uniformed line, she drew back screaming.

"It's all right, little one," Jeb called reassuringly. "These are your horses; come quickly, hop up and ride!"

One of the prisoners, understanding French, began to laugh as he translated this to his comrades, but Jeb peremptorily stopped all conversation. To let these fellows get an inch beyond the strictest discipline was to invite disaster. Yet now he could give orders through this interpreter, and soon the column was marching silently southward, its first three men each bearing on his shoulders a wan little victim from the "empire of death." The others followed obediently enough, while Jeb, in a position to enfilade the column—thus maintaining a command of each file—brought up the rear. From his attitude and voice the captives seemed to know that he was on a very dangerous tension, and that the slightest hesitation on their part would mean instant death. They had no desire

to test his skill further than that one snap shot through their officer's brain.

His first concern was to drive straight southward and get clear of the machine-gun redoubts, which he felt sure were being extended westward; and as the success of this plan hinged largely upon absolute silence, he had promised fourteen inches of bayonet to the first man who spoke, coughed, sneezed, or stubbed his toe. Moreover, he was recklessly prepared to execute this threat without a second's hesitation, fully realizing that if he would hold supremacy against such overpowering odds he must let his words and acts mesh with the nicety of machine gears, or his authority would vanish.

From time to time, when the burden of this responsibility began to wear down his courage, and fear came creeping in at the sheer audacity of this undertaking, he would raise his eyes to the three little tots ahead—and feel every nerve grow steady. As a consequence, the men were thoroughly in hand, stepping with caution and showing every disposition to carry out his orders.

In this way they covered perhaps a mile,

reaching a ground of comparative safety where their silence might have relaxed without bringing about disaster. But Jeb would take no chance, and forced the column to proceed with the same scrupulous care. As he was skirting a group of the dead, that looked frightfully grotesque in the pale moonlight, a voice almost at his back sent terror to his soul—then joy.

"Well, w'ot d'ye know about thot!" it said guardedly.

"Tim!" he cried, instantly calling a halt. There could be no mistaking that voice, were it heard anywhere on earth. "Tim, where are you?"

"If it ain't Jeb, may I be shot for a spy! B'ys, deliverance is come!" And the sergeant raised himself to a sitting position, while several forms about him also began to stir.

"You blessed Irishman," said Jeb, delightedly, "if I could take my eyes off this bunch, darned if I wouldn't kiss you!"

"Ye've brought better'n a kiss, lad—but ye can do thot yit, mind ye, if I see inither sun!"

"Are you too badly hurt to be carried in?"

"Thot's a divil av a question, now! Sure,

me an' the b'ys is too continted to move for annything, lest 'tis a pitcher av ice-water——" his voice seemed to crack at the mention of this.

Through the interpreter Jeb ordered a man to lift him; and as a big fellow stepped forward, Tim chuckled:

"If this don't beat the Dutch, may I be shot —ow! me leg! Here, ye butcher, don't ye know better'n to handle a mon like a trunk! Kneel, ye spalpeen, whilst I straddle the neck av ye!"

When the German arose with Tim firmly astride his shoulders Jeb sent out another prisoner, then another, until nine wounded were prepared for transport rearward.

"You're sure there aren't any more, Tim?" he asked.

"Faith, an' I wisht there was, lad," the sergeant answered soberly. "Pass me up me rifle, like a good b'y, forinst we start! I see be the black-and-gold button on me ar-rmy mule thot he's a Landstrumer, an' they's tricky b'ys, at times!"

There was a cheer so spontaneous about this Irishman, whose very genius for happiness had

lightened many a heavy burden, that his mount began to shake with laughter; whereupon Tim, in spite of a wound that pained grievously, grinned down at him.

"Laugh away, ye fat-headed Fritz," he said. "But don't go tryin' to buck me off, or 'tis Tim Doreen'll crack yer periscope—bein' as he's settin' on it! Jeb, ye've two spare ar-rmy mules—let thim bring in all the rifles, like a good lad!"

They had gone but a little way when Tim caught the German by the ear, saying:

"Gee-haw, ye beggarly Boche! Turn 'round, an' take me to the boss av this job!"—but, as the prisoner did no more than flinch, he called back: "Jeb, order this outcast to halt, whilst ye come up to us!"

When this had been accomplished through the interpreter, and the two friends were moving side by side, the sergeant asked:

"D'ye think there's no fear av this divil understandin' God's language? Thin, I've a mind to ask w'ot's come over ye, lad—but ye mustn't be takin' it amiss! Ye know thot whin I saw ye last, ye wasn't w'ot I'd call love-sick for a scrap!"

"Tim," he answered, in an awed voice, "it was the sight of those children!"

"The childer, ye say! Thim w'ot's forinst us?"

"Yes. They did it! God, but they were a terrible sight to see—it sort of made me crazy!"

" 'Tis a Christian kind av insanity, lad," the sergeant mused. "I hope ye'll be havin' a domn fine lot av it!"

Thus, when the low-lying moon flooded the dressing-station quadrangle, Jeb, with fourteen prisoners, nine wounded comrades and three little citizens from the "empire of death," was challenged by lookouts of a new regiment that had arrived during the night to occupy the old front line trench. The next minute cheers were ringing from a thousand throats.

Crossing the narrow bridge Tim, though weak from pain, yelled:

"Sind a squad after us, lads, an' ye can have our mules whin they're unloaded!"

Dr. Bonsecours had turned with a sigh of relief from the last of his cases and stepped out-

side for a breath of air, when the sound of cheering reached him.

"There is some good news," he called to Marian, who came and stood nearby, listening. Yet, even at that moment, his thoughts were of her, and he turned, saying gently: "You must rest; I really insist upon it! If you don't, I—I shall break down, myself."

She looked at him searchingly, reading well the fatigue, the unutterable strain, which marked his face, and whispered:

"You're the one who needs it! Don't you realize how helpless we would be here without you?"

"And how helpless I would be without *you?*" he murmured. "Oh, my wonderful Marian——!" He checked himself with an effort; yet, had the moon been brighter, he would have seen the pallor in her face yield to a flood of warm color.

The tramp of men was coming nearer, men who slipped and stumbled down the steep road, and then a group of curious figures staggered into view, seeming in the uncertain light scarcely to be human. Turning right they

marched heavily to the dressing-station entrance and, at Jeb's command, halted.

Bonsecours, with mouth agape, stepped back at their approach, while Marian drew slightly closer to him. There is nothing in the French language which exactly corresponds to our expression of amazement: "Well, I'll be damned!" but whatever comes nearest to it is what the great surgeon now said, like a common sapper. At the same instant the nurse at his side gave a low cry. She was not looking at Jeb, but at the children.

CHAPTER XVI

Scarcely were the children lifted down before Marian had kneeled and taken them in her arms. Quicker than Bonsecours she had read the story of their destruction, and now sobbed over them as though her heart would break. One had clasped her neck, but the other two, unable to stand, merely stared with wide-open eyes devoid of the slightest understanding. It was when the great French surgeon looked upon these—little tots whose minds were shattered by cruelties purposely conceived for them, and whose bodies were starved to skeleton thinness in order that thieves and degenerates might grow fat—that he swore a mighty oath and buried his face in his hands.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,*" he muttered fiercely, "how many more will they add to the thousands I have already seen!"

Jeb had glanced only once at Marian, being

afraid of the reproach her eyes might still hold for him; but as soon as a squad trotted up to receive the prisoners he turned away, welcoming another duty which sternly summoned him back to the plain. For the machine-gun redoubts had to be taken before their deadly fire could pour into those brave fellows who had swept ahead—and this must be done before uncompromising daylight made the work too costly! So he turned without glancing again at Marian. Yet no decoration for a brave deed might have been more brilliant than her look which followed him, could she have shut out the torturing picture of his debasement at the shell hole. A quick prayer sprang from her soul into space as she whispered fervently: "God keep his courage stiff!" She had not thought about his body; she did not care about his body! It was to make a soldier that she prayed.

Bonsecours, having seen the look and movement of her lips, asked gently:

"Do you know him?"

"We grew up in the same town, back home," she answered, still gazing after Jeb.

"Oh!" he said. It was a gasp of pain, and he

stood as though a shell had burst and stunned him. In his headlong work between guns of opposing armies, he had never stopped to wonder if there might be someone else in this Nurse Marian's life; and now, stung by a possible realization of it, his mind leaped outward to fears and fancied facts—all of which she might have told him were groundless. Turning toward the dug-out, he said briefly over his shoulder: "Please see to the children. My own cases are waiting."

Down into the trench Jeb had run, calling for an officer, and was soon making his report to the Colonel, who peremptorily asked:

"You can show us these positions?"

"Two of them, sir; the others must occupy the same general line."

Silently, but in the highest spirits, three thousand men went over the top, deploying in open order to make their drag-net stretch to its farthest capacity and sweep up the redoubts, whose locations, after all, were largely a matter of conjecture.

Jeb, fighting hard to hold himself steady, pressed toward the right, where he thought the

first digging party could be found; yet, before he sighted it, firing broke out to his left, then farther to his left—each time with the unmistakable fusillade of machine-guns answered by cracking rifles. One bunch at a time, the enemy was being flushed from cover; yet at each new outburst he gasped more and more for air,—feeling in his soul what was coming over him, and swearing roundly to drive it back.

"We ain't going to miss anything, are we?" a cheery voice at his back called out.

"We'll find it, all right," he panted; but might have saved his breath, for that very instant they were met by a fire which, in a light less deceptive, would have been gruelling even to their openly deployed skirmish line.

Without awaiting commands—were there any to wait for—the men, ducking low, dashed past him toward the pit, leaped down into it gouging their bayonets right and left. With the sentry's rifle still in his hands he tried to follow; but at the brink, being confronted by sounds of steel upon steel, oaths, grunts, yells of victory and of pain, his legs refused to move. The old fear was wrapping itself about him. But then came

cries of "Kamerad!"—and upon hearing these he bounded in, knowing the place had surrendered.

"The ruined hamlet next," he yelled. "There's a lot of supplies there!"

The men sprang out after him, laughing now in sheer exuberance of spirits, and throwing taunts at a few of their disgruntled mates who had been left to watch the prisoners and spoils. But Jeb could not laugh. His jaws were set in grim determination. He was soul-sick and furious. He had not played fair—although his comrades were far from suspecting it. He swore to himself over and over, on the memory of those children whom he had saved at this place, that he would be the first to go in and the last to come out, were it to mean death a hundred times.

But the hamlet put up no resistance; it lay still and deserted, as though some marauding monster had torn it in its teeth and passed on by. This silence, however, did not deceive Jeb. Even through the chaos of his brain he had a rather fair idea of how many small engagements had taken place back on the plain, and

judged them to be far short of the newly built redoubts; thereby conjecturing that several of the companies must have deserted their positions and fallen in upon the more secure catacombs. Advising the men to scatter and search the cellars, he discovered at last a large, although artfully disguised, opening to the subterranean area below.

"Who speaks German?" he asked, of those who stood about him.

"I," said one.

"Then yell down and tell 'em to come out, or be blown out!"

But someone below must have understood English and quickly translated, because long cries of "Kamerad, Kamerad," floated eerily up, as if a cover had been lifted from some pit in hell releasing the wails of incarcerated spirits. Answering with yells of derision the troops climbed to the street level and formed to receive prisoners; whereupon, casting rifles aside as they gained the open, the inhabitants of this underworld filed out.

When the catacombs had been searched and quantities of munitions for the machine-guns

salvaged, Jeb led the way back across the now silent No Man's Land that had passed into the pages of history. One by one the other units were picked up, standing guard over captured positions. Everything had been swept into the Allied pocket at an insignificant cost.

Dawn had not yet streaked the east. Except for a fitful shot somewhere back across the plain, where an overstrained sentry fired at a shadow, the world slept. The regiment, flushed and happy, sprang down into its trench; and Jeb was turning glumly toward the gravelly road, when the Colonel stepped after him.

"I haven't your name," he said. "I want to send it in."

"Oh, that's all right," Jeb answered, afraid to look at this commander of men, lest even in the dim light his striken conscience might be revealed.

"But it isn't all right," the officer smiled. "I heard what you did earlier to-night—a rather fine thing, that!—and now you've turned another trick, giving us eight hundred prisoners, twelve machine-gun sections, and various stuff. You deserve a mention."

"Then just tell 'em," Jeb began; but he could not claim it and, blushing guiltily, hurried off, yelling over his shoulder: "It isn't worth while, really!"

Yet there had been something else that happened out on the field which meant a great deal more to him. It had been while they were marching homeward, when this same officer had laid a hand upon his arm and said: "I hope the American army which landed yesterday is made up of your stuff!" The words did not in any sense imply doubt; merely compliment, but Jeb inwardly cringed because the American Army had been graded, even in ignorance, with such as he. At that instant he had made a resolve—an earnest, solemn resolve—to join that army and, by its influence, prove himself worthy.

He now went hurriedly down into the quadrangle and turned to the dug-out where he expected to find Bonsecours—the man who superseded Barrow in authority. For he guessed that an ambulance would be standing farther at the rear, waiting for the nine men whom he had brought in. When it took them back, he determined that it would also take him to the fellows

from home who had just landed—to a new opportunity! Perhaps it was ready to leave at any moment, and this thought gave him greater speed.

As he entered Tim, the last to receive attention, lay in a stretcher ready to be moved. He had insisted upon being last, claiming this preference because of the fact that he was a sergeant; and now, although with a badly shattered leg which the surgeon had told him might later have to go, he grinned broadly as Jeb clasped his hand. Bonsecours' greeting also was affectionate and genuine; for, despite his fading hope of happiness, and the memory of Jeb's face which had worn the stamp of abject fear twenty-four hours earlier, he was too big a man to refuse tribute to a manly deed.

"Well, lad," Tim, his mouth drawn with pain, tried to laugh—tried to "bluff it out" so Jeb would not suspect the truth, "I'm thinkin' thot life's wan domn hole after anither! First, mind ye, 'tis the swimmin' hole, thin the shell hole, thin a hole in me leg, an' next we know 'tis a stay-for-keeps hole in the ground! W'ot a divil av a hole the ould world is, after all! But me

leg'll be all right in a fortnight, lad," (oh, Tim, you beloved liar!) "an' thin I'll be back wid the b'ys twict as strong as iver!"

"That's mighty fine news," Jeb laughed. "But I hope to go back with you now!"

"I'm not goin' now," Tim cried angrily. "I've swore 'tis not a step I take till I've said 'God bless ye' to thot angel nurse!"

"There, there, Tim, keep quiet! Haven't I promised that you could?" Bonsecours smiled at him.

"Thin w'ot's the lad sayin' about takin' me now?"

"Oh, I only meant when you are ready, Tim," Jeb did his part to quiet the excited little sergeant; then, to the doctor, he added quickly: "I want to go back with the ambulance, that's all. The Americans landed yesterday, and——"

"But," the surgeon gasped at this unusual request, "Barrow needs you!"

"I guess he doesn't, so awfully much," Jeb flushed. "If you can possibly arrange it for me, I'll be greatly obliged. I've—I've just got to get in the ranks, Doctor! I can't explain what I mean—but it's those children! Why, if each

of the ten million American fellows who registered for our New Army could see only a part of cruelties I've seen, they'd break their necks getting over here!—and they wouldn't go back, either, not even for Christmas, till the last of these German High-in-Command was in prison, or dead! I'm only asking for a chance to make good——"

"Cut thot out," Tim called huskily. "It hur-rts me leg!"

Bonsecours laughed but, still protesting, said:

"I can't keep the ambulance waiting!"

"You won't have to; I'm ready now."

"But your kit——?"

"Is on my back, sir."

Two big orderlies came in and picked up the stretcher, whereupon Tim grew again excited.

"Put me down, ye little runts," he yelled, "afore I git up an' smash——"

"There, there," Bonsecours hastily interposed; saying to them: "Take this brave fellow to Dug-out Three—he wants to see Nurse Marian. I'll be right after you." But the instant they had left he turned to Jeb, asking

sharply: "Do you realize what your leaving means?"

"I think I do, sir."

"You would deliberately put upon me the responsibility of sending you?"

"Why, yes," Jeb answered, somewhat perplexed.

"Then I refuse!" the surgeon snapped. "I refuse, until you bring me word that your little nurse friend from America desires it!"

Unaware of what was passing in Bonsecours' mind, Jeb stared after him in complete amazement. He had intended, of course, to see Marian and say good-bye to her, although it was an interview toward which he looked with so much dread that once or twice he had thought of escaping it, and writing her from somewhere else. Yet now he must bring some word from her to this cranky surgeon, or he dared not leave, at all! His nerves were rattled, and he fumbled through his pockets for the "makings"; spilled the tobacco and threw his ineffectual effort away in disgust. Marian was in Dug-out Three, with Tim, Bonsecours, and the stretcher-bearers! Oh, well, he told himself,

perhaps it would be easier to have them all present!—and he went out resolutely, turning toward the third entrance. But on the threshold his resolution failed, and he drew back, staring.

The soft light from an oil lamp made the interior look warm and attractive, particularly because Marian was standing by the side of Tim, smiling tenderly down at him. Across from her Bonsecours stood, also smiling, but with a look of weariness—perhaps it was unhappiness. The bearers were grinning, as the little sergeant now continued with what, evidently, he had been saying:

"So ye see, lass, I couldn't go Blighty till I'd whispered a 'God bless ye' to me own, an' only, sister!"

"I'd be very proud if you were my brother, Tim," she replied, soothingly.

"She'd be very proud *if I were,*" he looked at Bonsecours with a broad grin. "Now w'ot d'ye know about thot, Doctor! If *I were,* indade!—as if I *wasn't!* Shure, an' if the same blood don't run in both our veins, 'tis not Tim Doreen as would be here now, a-tellin' av it!"

"You're perfectly right," the surgeon laughed. "I did that deed myself, and it ought to make you her brother!"

"*Ought* to! Faith, an' it *did!*—iver since thot day the blessed angel says to ye: 'Thin do yer dooty an' save 'im!', as she put out her ar-rm for the sacrifice thot kept me here on earth!"

"Please stop—both of you!" she implored.

"Shure, lass, an' 'tis no harm speakin' av a noble deed. An' now," he added, folding his hands upon his breast, and closing his eyes in mock contentment, " 'tis me last wish an' tistament to make the good Doctor Bonsecours me brother-in-law!"

"One must be in his right mind to make a last 'wish and tistament,' " Marian tried to look at him severely; but, the next instant, she leaned impulsively over and kissed his cheeks—then ran out the doorway.

Jeb had barely time to draw back when she dashed past him and turned toward the road leading above the dug-outs. She might readily have seen him had her haste and confusion been less, because the dawn was coming, and objects

in the quadrangle were vaguely beginning to take shape. A new day was creeping up over the hill. The cold, unsympathetic light, matching the compass of his thoughts, made the world look gray and sordid.

He had heard, and now realized with a new depression that henceforth he could be no more a part of her life than any one of the millions who were fighting the battle of Humanity in this stricken land. Not that he pretended to love her inordinately, by any means, but a man need only love a girl with a very small portion of his heart to feel a throb of pain when she surrenders to some one else. It was this sense of being left behind that hurt; of being deserted by his old playmate—and of deserving it! He turned slowly and followed after her.

She did not hear him as he came up, and when he approached to within a few feet of her he saw the reason. The dawn was streaking the sky with pink and salmon tints, and, although her eyes were gazing into it, her thoughts reached far beyond. Standing upon the hill-top, her hands crossed over the red emblem on her breast, the half-light of soft color touching

her immobile face, she typified the Spirit of Mercy poised above the unawakened battlefield, ready at the first gun's crash to fly downward with her warmth, her strength, her sympathy.

For the moment forgetting his own mission in the presence of the transfigured Marian, Jeb stood abashed. Yet the minutes were passing, and the ambulance would not wait.

"I—I came up to say good-bye," he stammered, awkwardly. "I'm going."

She turned, seeming reluctant to be torn from her meditations, and quietly asked:

"Where?"

He told her in a few words, adding:

"Bonsecours won't give his permission unless you agree."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

But she knew. From a multitude of small things, and with an intuition almost divine, she read another chapter of the great surgeon's nobility, and turned her eyes again toward the rainbow east. It was perhaps what she saw there in the changing sunrise that impelled her to whisper softly:

"I hope you'll always be as brave as you were last night, Jeb."

His cheeks burned, but he faced her without flinching and replied:

"I'm never going to run away again, if that's what you mean!"

"I had not intended to put it so cruelly, Jeb. You've done a great thing to-night, because you conquered two enemies at the same time—the one within you being infinitely a harder fight than the one without. I appreciate that, and am glad for you."

"I want you to forget that—that disgrace at the shell hole," he said, doggedly.

"Forget?" Her voice broke hysterically, and her eyes filled with tears of pity. "Ask me to forgive it, Jeb, and I may—but, forget it? Oh, how can I? Don't you understand?—I *saw* it! I *saw* it!"

"Stop, stop—please!" he cried huskily, passing his hand across his face. "Then don't forget, if—if you can't; but I'd hate to think of the Colonel, and Aunt Sallie, and——"

"Your secret is safe, if that's what you fear," she said, now as composedly as she had a mo-

ment before been moved. Again, for half a minute, she faced the sunrise, when her voice came wistfully:

"Oh, God, if—if I just hadn't *seen* it!"

He realized with full conviction that an impassable gulf lay between him and this girl. It was not his debasing weakness, so much as her discovery of it, that would forever stamp him with the brand of shame. The Arab sheik who one time said: "A thief may loot my tent and I will curse all thieves, but do I catch him at it and he dies!"—expressed the mind of all humanity. Marian had *seen* Jeb; and this meant that he was dead to her.

He watched her for a moment longer, then in a dispirited voice asked:

"Shall I tell Bonsecours it's all right for me to go?"

Without taking her face from the east, she answered evenly:

"Yes; tell him it's all right for you to go. I am praying God to watch over you, and—and make you truly worthy of a place among our soldiers from home."

He glanced back, and saw, far beyond the

quadrangle, two stretcher-bearers carrying Tim to the waiting ambulance. Once more he looked at Marian, tried twice to speak, but stood humbly mute before her—awed by her ennobling beauty. For again her exquisite hands were crossed over the red emblem upon her breast, her eyes gazed into the glorified sky, and her lips moved as she pleaded with the God of Hosts to fire this playmate at her side with the divine spark of courage—and keep him brave.

Jeb bowed his head, feeling as though he were within the precinct of a holy shrine; then in silence turned and went down the road, walking with firm steps which, he prayed, would lead to the dawn of a new manhood.

The first of the "75's" crashed spitefully, and in a chaotic instant the air and earth again were shorn of their blessed peace. Instantly the sky became streaked with trails of smoke from overpassing shells. Far to the north they fell and burst into white spray, as though a long Atlantic comber were pounding on a rocky shore.

She turned once and looked toward it, moved by infinite pity for the men who were being shattered; then started slowly back into the

quadrangle, just as Bonsecours dashed wildly up in search of her.

There were no words that he could say; he merely stood in front of her, holding out his arms. Her fingers, still laced over the Red Cross, fluttered nervously, as a butterfly, at the beginning of a summer storm, will cling to a flower—wanting, yet not daring to leave lest its frail wings, caught upon the wind, might carry it far out into an unexplored world. But her eyes gazed at him with illimitable yearning; then gently she swayed, stretched out her hands, and ran to him.

CHAPTER XVII

Trees that lined the streets of Hillsdale were touched with tints of red and gold, frescoed by the magic brush of approaching winter.

In the *Eagle* office sat the Colonel and Mr. Strong, looking thoughtfully into their laps. Tears glistened on their cheeks; for several minutes neither of them had spoken. Held in the editor's fingers was an open letter just received, while in the Colonel's inert hand lay a clipping from the Paris *Figaro*. The Colonel now glanced up slowly but, seeing Mr. Strong's face, sharply exclaimed:

"I wish you'd stop your infernal weeping, Amos!"

"I wish you'd stop your own!" the editor replied with equal asperity; then both of them began to laugh.

"I confess, Amos, that it's hard to keep back tears. Why, by gad, sir, he has done as much

as we ever did in the old fracas over here!—more, sir! And Marian—who the devil is that fellow she eulogizes to the sky? Here," he handed over the clipping, "read this again! It's a pity it isn't printed in English!"

"Let me first read what Marian says, Roger; then we'll take the clipping."

Three times within the last half hour these old gentlemen had followed exactly this same routine: first taking Marian's letter, written from Paris where she had been sent for a well-earned rest, and then laboriously translating the newspaper item she inclosed to them.

Mr. Strong now adjusted his glasses and began the letter a fourth time, while the Colonel leaned forward, hanging upon each word. It recited first what Tim Doreen had magnanimously told about Jeb, losing none of that Irishman's vividness; then it went on at great length to describe a certain Dr. Georges Bonsecours. Page after page she wrote of him; citing innumerable instances of his valor, both while under gruelling fire out on the field and endless hours of indefatigable work beneath the dug-out shelters. Having fully covered his present,

she dashed into his past with a reckless disregard of ink and paper, and filled many other pages. Only once did the Colonel interrupt, and then to remark drily:

"Seems like a pretty thorough biographical sketch, Amos."

He had made this same observation, just at this same place, upon each of the previous readings; and the editor had hesitated, cleared his throat—as he now did—before continuing with the only mention Marian had written of this great surgeon's future, which was, briefly:

"When the war is over, he is coming out to Hillsdale."

For a fourth time now Mr. Strong's eyes grew moist, as he asked:

"What do you suppose he wants to come out here to Hillsdale for?"

The Colonel had not previously deigned to answer this; he had merely subsided into silence and let a lump rise in his throat in sympathy with the editor. This time, however, he turned squarely to his friend and asked:

"Amos, are you trying to be a pig-headed old fool, or do you really want the truth!"

Mr. Strong looked at him rather humorously.

"I think I'll dodge the truth, at any rate, Roger—until this doctor arrives. How do you think Miss Sallie and Miss Veemie will take it?"

"Take it? Why, they'll take it just as we do —with joyful hearts, because their boy and our girl have achieved great things! I never wanted her to marry Jeb, anyhow!" And to Mr. Strong's smile of surprise, he thundered: "By cracky, I tell you I didn't, Roger! Jeb was too immature for her—he had yet to prove himself!"

"He's proved himself now," the editor emphatically replied.

"He has, indeed," the Colonel's voice sank to tenderness. "He has, indeed," he added to himself, as though he could not quite understand it. "But, Amos, she needs a man of broader calibre—you know she does! They weren't ever seriously in love with each other, anyhow!—don't interrupt me again!—I tell you they weren't! Just because their dear mothers expressed a wish for them to marry, you, and

those two little old maids out there, got to sentimentalizing over it until the poor children were hypnotized. Why, confound it, I call them lucky to have escaped! I wonder, by the way," he added thoughtfully, "if this Doctor What's-his-name talks English, or the jargon in which that clipping is printed! He'll have a stupid time here in Hillsdale, that's all I've got to say."

Mr. Strong laughed outright.

"You're mighty cock-sure about him and Marian!"

"Because I don't admit being a pig-headed old fool," the Colonel grinned. "If ever invisible words were written between lines of a letter, they're there in your hand! He's asked her, to a certainty; and she has either said yes, or intends to! Wait for the next mail! The little vixen is just preparing us—see if I ain't right! Now, read the other, Amos," he added gently.

The clipping was a long one, being a list of men in the American Army who had been recommended for the *Croix de Guerre,* and, among the many, he read:

"'Soldier Jebediah Tumpson, for going through a heavy barrage to search for a wounded platoon leader, and after two hours under constant fire bringing him back in safety.'"

"What's that thing they want to give him?" the Colonel asked, after they had been silent with their own thoughts for several moments. There was a huskiness in his voice that suggested another approach of tears.

"*Croix de Guerre,*" Mr. Strong coughed and answered. "It means the Cross of War."

"Then why the devil didn't you say Cross of War, Amos," he demanded, trying valiantly to hide his emotion. "What's the sense of using words that sound like a dog fight!—g-r-r-r-r!—Croix de G-r-r-r-r, indeed!—when you know how to say it in decent American English!"

The editor smiled understandingly, and again they relapsed into meditation; their hearts beating happily, the Colonel's stout boot tapping contentedly upon the oaken floor.

"Amos," he shouted, springing at last to his feet, "there's no damned German army ever

recruited can stand before our boys when we get good and mad!"

Mr. Strong arose and closed his roll-top desk with a bang. Laying a hand on his friend's shoulder, he said:

"You're damn right! Now get your overcoat——"

"Pouf! I don't need any overcoat!" the Colonel cried disdainfully, feeling himself warmed by the old spirit of 1861, which had been fanned into a comforting glow by the new spirit of 1917.

"Yes, you do, Roger, for I heard you coughing only yesterday!—and you remember what I promised Marian!"

"I will, if you put on your muffler, Amos!"

"Oh, very well. But what I started to say is, that—while I don't make a practice of it—I think we're entitled to go to the hotel for a small—er-a! Then we'll walk out Main street, and take this good news to the little aunts!"

"And some flowers, Amos! Tulips, if we can find any—a big bunch of 'em!"

THE END

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